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Gnome

THE 11th of September 2006 is the anniversary of a momentous day in the history of the world. It is exactly one year since the 11th of September 2005, when we published our historic supplement, *9/11 – The Unforgettable Event That We Must Always Remember.* Now, in a special 911-page commemorative issue, we look back at how history has been redefined by the events that shaped our last commemorative issue.

And we ask these important questions: What were the dark forces at work in the clash of civilisations? What are the unanswered questions that haunt the western world as it sleeps uneasily in its bed? How has the world changed irrevocably as it seeks to confront the demons unleashed on that fateful day when time stood still and the clock turned back history?

And, perhaps most importantly of all – can we put in those pictures again of the planes smashing into the buildings, the people jumping out of the towers to their deaths and that one of the woman covered in ash and looking terrified?

Yes, of course we can – as well as anything else we can use to pad out this memorial issue that soberly and seriously reflects on the utterly changed universe that we now live in.

Also includes:

- Kate Moss in her knickers **3**
- Posh's bum – is it real? **7**
- Diana – she had secret sex with Charles. Butler's shock claim **11**
- Crouch scores in bed too **94**

(Shome mishtake shurely? Ed.)

All in today's amazing PRIVATE N-EYE-N ELEVEN!

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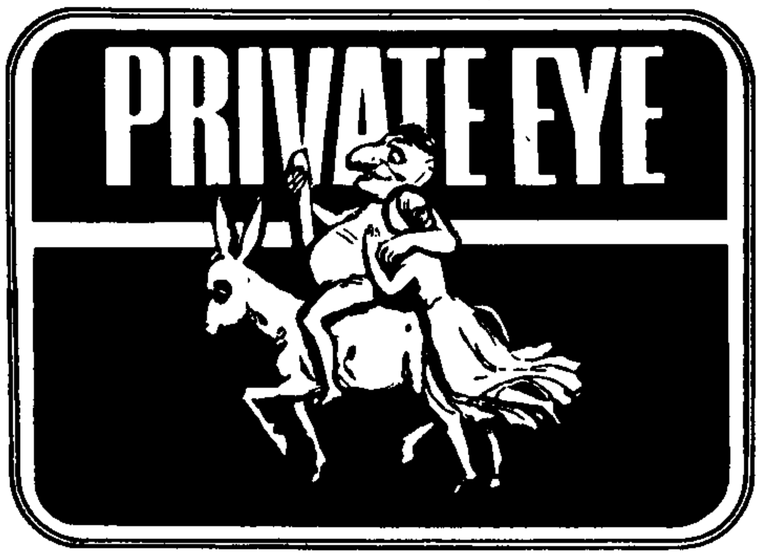

Brown sauce

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IN THE annals of rank ingratitude, the role played by Sion Simon MP in organising last week's anti-Blair round-robin deserves an honoured place. For he owes not one but two of his careers to the Dear Leader.

Simon launched himself in Fleet Street in the mid-1990s – first as a *Spectator* pundit, then in the *Telegraph* and *News of the Screws* – by persuading editors they needed a Blairite ex-apparatchik such as himself to explain New Labour to readers.

He brown-nosed Blair in countless adulatory columns whose subtext was all too obvious: Gissa Seat. Sure enough, just before the 2001 general election, the Birmingham Erdington MP Robin Corbett suddenly announced he wouldn't be standing – enabling Labour's NEC to impose its own shortlist for the vacancy, bypassing the normal procedures.

The *Eye* predicted at the time that the "Blairite carpetbagger" Sion Simon would be rewarded for his sycophancy – a claim indignantly denied by Corbett, who assured Lord Gnome that his local party "would be consulted over the shortlist of candidates" and "the NEC cannot shoo in a Blairite carpetbagger even if it wanted to".

Whoops! The NEC excluded all local applicants from the list and the London-based Blairite carpetbagger Simon was duly selected!

With his feet under the table as an MP, Simon was at his slippery best just after the May 2005 election when Blair attended a meeting of the parliamentary Labour Party at which he was told by a number of rebel MPs that he should give a timetable for stepping down as leader.

Simon primly slapped down such demands, telling the meeting: "The silent majority is supporting the Prime Minister. The silent majority won't be silenced."

Last week the silent majority spoke out loud and clear when Simon signed a letter pointing out that "it is clear to us – as it is to almost the entire party and the entire country – that without an urgent change in the leadership of the party it becomes less likely that we will win the next general election."

AFTER his ostentatious resignation last week, junior defence minister Tom Watson was universally described as a well-known Brownite. But his allegiance to the chancellor hasn't always been common knowledge.

Indeed, at a Soho party four years ago he was accosted by a tired and emotional Charlie Whelan, Gordon Brown's former spin-doctor, who denounced him as a Blairite lickspittle – and, for good measure, "a fucking cunt". As the burly Watson squared up to him, friends hastily dragged Whelan away – with the spin-doctor yelling: "The cunt took a swing at me".

Watson's views on how political parties should jettison unwanted leaders, meanwhile, appear somewhat incoherent. "Frankly I am staggered," he wrote in his online blog on 7 January when the Lib Dems were having a clear out.

"In the last two days colleagues of Charles Kennedy have been utterly despicable. Seldom, in fact, never, have I seen such tawdry and downright nasty behaviour amongst politicians. Remember, these people are supposed to be the nice politicians – more like social psychopaths if you ask me... They've sacked their most successful post-war leader and now they're fighting like ferrets in a sack. Disgraceful."

Eight months later, Watson signed a letter to Tony Blair demanding that he stand aside "as a matter of urgency", leaked it to the press, resigned from his job as a junior minister and published his resignation letter in which he announced: "I no longer believe that your remaining in office is in the interest of either the party or the country. How and why this situation has arisen no longer matters. I share the view of the overwhelming majority of the party and the country that the only way the party and the government can renew itself in office is urgently to renew its leadership."

SO ANXIOUS was Gordon Brown to impress the right of New Labour in his interview with Andrew Marr at the weekend that he even claimed to have "introduced" the hugely wasteful private finance initiative.

In fact PFI was very much a Tory creation, brought in under John Major's chancellor Norman Lamont. (Major too has recently been boasting about bringing the scheme in on visits to Eastern Europe). It was only when Gordon saw PFI's "off balance sheet" magic that he and his then-sidekick Geoffrey Robinson gave the idea a boost by tweaking the rules to allow companies to make a fortune from it.

Health and other services are now paying the price but at least the chancellor can claim to have stayed within his rules and be universally acknowledged to have a good record on the economy. Some might wonder, however, if Gordon was prepared to tell this porky, what else might he not have been totally straight to Marr on?

GORDON BROWN's tax credit policy isn't just driving claimants mad: it's thrown his own staff into a state of gibbering confusion too.

After reporting changes in her childcare arrangements, one *Eye* reader had the temerity to question a demand for repayment of a tax credit overpayment. Not only did HM Revenue and Customs' customer support unit respond that "it is not possible to explain how the figure of [£x] per week was calculated", but she was also told the demand would stand as "we do not think it was reasonable for you to expect that your payments were correct".

Quite right, too. Anyone who knows anything about tax credits would never believe they were being paid the right amount...

BLAIR FIXES DATE

"It's May – or May not"

Street Of Shame

LETTERS announcing 133 redundancies at the *Telegraph* group went out last weekend – neatly timed to coincide with the *Telegraph*'s annual "family day out" for staff, held at Leeds Castle.

Still, never let it be said that *Telegraph* bosses are insensitive. When hatchet-man Lawrie Sear summoned foreign editor Alan Philps last week to give him his marching orders, Philps was surprised to notice that the letter of dismissal was actually addressed to comment editor Stephen Robinson.

It seems Sear had intended to sack him the same day – but had to hold off as Robinson was absent on compassionate leave following a family bereavement.

WHILE other newspapers were raising eyebrows over the murky goings-on at West Ham – with a cast including a fugitive Russian tycoon, a Georgian billionaire, an Iranian car-dealer and two star Argentine players – *News of the Screws* football pundit Martin Samuel hastened to reassure readers there was nothing to worry about.

"If Upton Park becomes a shop window for the best young players in South America, the football improves and the club thrives on the back of that, why should fans feel guilty?... Football sold out long before West Ham did."

No need, then, for the *Screws* to ask its investigative hacks to find out more about the men behind this scheme for global football domination.

Two key figures in the saga are Boris Berezovsky, the London-based oligarch who faces fraud charges if he ever returns to Russia, and the richest man in the former Soviet state of Georgia, one Badri Patarkatsishvili. (Crazy name, crazy guy!) Patarkatsishvili is also unable to set foot in Russia, as the prosecutor-general in Moscow wants him arrested and extradited to stand trial for "financial irregularities" allegedly committed with Berezovsky in the mid-1990s. But he is a powerful figure in the Georgian capital of Tblisi, where his business empire includes the TV company Imedi.

On a visit to London last month he announced a new "partnership deal" with an investor who had acquired a 30 percent stake in Imedi – none other than the Dirty Digger's News Corp! We trust Murdoch hacks will continue to bear this mind as the West Ham story unfolds.

"POSHED AS A NEWT!" shrieked the *Daily Mirror* over the front-page "news" that Victoria Beckham had been pictured staggering around drunk at 5am after a night out in London.

Not to be outdone, the *Star* rechristened her "Slosh Spice", while the *Evening Standard*'s headline was equally succinct: "BENDER IT LIKE BECKHAM".

One title, however, went for a different approach: "POSH JUST ACE IN LACE", simpered the *Sun,* over a full-page picture of Mrs Beckham looking demure, sober, and, er, "luscious in lace during a night on the loose".

Why the restraint? A clue was provided by the *Daily Mail*'s account of how her "civilised evening of fine dining descended into one of raucous tomfoolery" – "her companions included the chef Gordon Ramsay and his wife Tana, interior designer Kelly Hoppen, actor Ross Kemp and his wife *Sun* editor Rebekah Wade." And we all know what *she's* like with a few drinks inside her, as her husband could have testified (but refused to) last November.

REBEKAH Wade certainly knows how to make the best use of her talented staff. One evening recently she rang Scottish *Sun* editor David Dinsmore with urgent news: Rebekah's dear old forgetful mum had left her £2,000 Armani coat on a train which was due to terminate in Edinburgh.

A young hack was immediately dispatched to scour the locomotive on its late-night arrival and managed to recover the garment. It was then sent back to its grateful owner in Cheshire.

And the gopher's sweet reward for recovering this valuable coat? A £2 bag of M&S toffees.

"THE *Evening Standard* does not cater for the vast majority of young Londoners, which is what our paper will do," editor Stefano Hatfield announced of the irritatingly-titled *thelondonpaper*. "It is about a state of mind that has largely been ignored by the national press."

So far, the new title has demonstrated just how down with the kids it is by managing to get celebrity junkie Pete Doherty muddled up with rapper P Diddy (and in the process accusing the clean-living multi-millionaire of being "done for possessing crack cocaine, heroin and cannabis"), renaming Madonna's song *Like a Virgin* as *I'm a Virgin*, and delivering "insider gossip" in its "buzz" column on such youth icons as John Prescott and the Mittal brothers.

Last week did, however, appear to be Bring Your Dad To Work Week across the UK's gossip columns, with the *Mirror*'s 3am girls reporting from a Scissor Sisters concert hosted by MTV that "the music was a tad too loud".

NEWS International's spanking new freesheet *thelondonpaper* is, as is inevitable these days, a multimedia operation.

Editor Stefano Hatfield tells readers that: "Our website takes a broadband look at life in London with daily video coverage of news and entertainment across the city... There will be fewer pontificating columnists and more opportunities for you to contribute – be it either as a model, or simply by voting to decide if a writer can return. Please, let us know about all our Londons."

A full week after the paper launched and bereft of any kind of feedback whatsoever, the website had taken on a pleading tone: "Send us your thoughts and your letter will appear here... Send us your pictures and they will appear here... Send us your views on the news and be among the first to have a letter published in London's newest paper. Go on, tell us!"

THE *Mail on Sunday* found an expert witness to help it with a lengthy profile of Peaches Geldof on 3 September: Sophie Parkin, described as a "novelist" and someone who "has known Peaches since she was a little girl."

"Peaches and Sophie's own daughter Carson, 16, were, until recently, close friends," the paper noted. "'I have tried to speak to Bob in the past, as have others, about Peaches' welfare,' she explains. 'Not only will he not listen but he sends legal letters. He has shouted down the phone to me and sent legal letters to the other kids' godparents."

Could Sir Bob's legal letters – and Carson and Peaches' falling out – be by any chance related to the 2,000 words Parkin penned in May 2005 for the *Daily Mail*, revealing intimate details of the then 16-year-old's personal life, as well as calling her father an absentee and a hypocrite?

MARVELLOUS news for *Daily Star* readers on 24 August: "*Big Brother* fans have no fear as there is still plenty to get excited about: *X Factor* is back!"

Two days later a *Star* photo showed "*X Factor* judge Simon Cowell eyeing up a pair of winners as he supports a very worthy cause. Big-hearted Simon visited Christopher's, a children's hospice in Artington, Surrey, to drop off some sought-after tickets for the live *X Factor* shows."

So it has continued ever since, with a steady stream of page-leads and features showing Cowell in a favourable light. And no wonder. On 22 August, just before the gush began, Richard "Dirty" Desmond paraded Simon Cowell around the *Star*'s office. Hacks who might have been unsure of the paper's editorial line duly took the hint, and Ms Nasty became big-hearted Simon. Bless!

INTERFERING in the editorial process of his newspapers has long been a favourite pastime for chairman Richard Desmond. Dirty Des has a say in all headlines and stories involving his celebrity friends, big-money advertisers, Lord Levy and of course the situation in the Middle East.

Now it seems he is extending his role to staff appointments. Ben Knowles, deputy editor of ailing lad-mag *Zoo*, joined the *Daily Star* two weeks ago as No 2 to the statuesque editrix Dawn Neesom. How did she find out? His name suddenly appeared in the company phone list!

HOW JOURNALISM WORKS

"The press lives by disclosure."

– John Thaddeus Delane, editor of *The Times*, 1851.

"I think now you are certainly seeing at News International that we are doing a lot of deals which are not just conventional advertising deals, they are more about advertising solutions for clients, which encompasses both advertising but also conferences for bespoke products, target-reader communications, online solutions, microsites, these things are being created now by us and others. It's becoming a bigger and bigger component of what we do."

– Clive Milner, managing director of Rupert Murdoch's UK titles (including *The Times*), September 2006.

***GRAUNIAD* hacks are threatening industrial action after rejecting the offer of a 3 percent pay rise.**

No doubt their campaign will have the full backing of editor Alan Rusbridger. Latest figures from the Guardian Media Group reveal that last year he was awarded a bonus of £175,000 "in recognition of his leading role". On top of that, his basic salary rose from £272,000 to £312,000 – a hike of 14.7 percent!

"I thought you cancelled the junk mail"

ANOTHER day, another apocalyptic front-page headline from the *Independent*. "THE JUNK MOUNTAIN" is the cue for the usual liberal outrage, this time over the proliferation of junk mail – "the vast majority of which is discarded unopened".

Bemoaning the environmental consequences of each household in Britain "now receiving the equivalent of 18 [junk] items a week", the *Indie* quoted Lib Dem MP Norman Baker, who "has called on ministers to 'name and shame' the most prolific companies, to make unsolicited post and leaflets socially unacceptable".

But what is that slipping out of the same copy of the paper? Could it be two unsolicited commercial fliers, each no doubt destined for the bin?

It surely could.

"IT'S hard to decide which is more impressive – his suits or his contacts book." Thus begins a drooling two-page interview with *GQ* editor Dylan Jones in Monday's *Independent*.

Indie hack Ian Burrell marvels at Jones's "tall, slender figure", at the "glittering audience" which attended his *GQ* awards ceremony last week, and at his mag's sensational circulation figures ("up 0.4 percent year on year").

To what does this gorgeous style icon attribute *GQ*'s success? "Great writing," he says. "It's not possible to find better writers working in the men's arena. We have a great roster." Burrell agrees, noting that Jones "has carefully cultivated big-name writers", many of whom "are his personal friends". These include such legendary literary giants as Rod Liddle, Piers Morgan and Simon Kelner – aka the editor of the *Independent*.

Might that explain why Kelner's newspaper sees fit to fill its media section with this *arslikhan* puffery?

WHAT is Kevin Pietersen's guiltiest pleasure? "Jetting off on holiday," he tells the *Guardian* in a Q&A interview, adding that his "favourite destination is Dubai".

And where would he like to live? "I love living in London but I would like to buy a place in Dubai and spend a few months of the year out there."

Strangely, neither KP nor the *Grauniad* sees fit to mention that when not batting for England he currently has a lucrative sideline as "celebrity ambassador" promoting… Dubai Properties!

THE NEOPHILIACS

"Is Alan Johnson the new John Major?" – Bruce Anderson, *Independent*.

"Is Peter Crouch really England's new Bobby Charlton?" – *The Times*.

"Cameron, the new Blair." – *Sunday Times*.

"Has Kate become the new Diana?" – *Daily Mail*.

"Truth is the new black." – *Independent*.

BOTTOM OF THE BURRELL

THE *Daily Express* celebrated the 9th anniversary of the death of Princess Diana as it celebrates every Monday, with a series of front pages giving "a unique insight into the many unanswered questions which still surround the death of the People's Princess".

One key witness quoted extensively in the paper's "Diana Dossier" was her butler Paul Burrell, who, the paper cloyingly revealed on 30 August, had prepared her body for its casket with "lipstick and face powder from her dressing table and a set of rosary beads, a gift from Mother Teresa".

The following day the paper quoted Burrell again, on how Diana was "captivated by Dodi's company, enthralled by his charm, excited by the novelty of his lavish romance"; while on Saturday 2 September it again returned to how "Burrell, her closest aide, revealed that in October 1996, only 10 months before her death, Diana had written him a letter outlining her fears that she would be 'bumped off' in a car with faulty brakes."

The following morning, in the serialisation of his latest book in the *Mail on Sunday*, the former butler concurred with all Diana's close friends and the bodyguards who had attended her in the days before her death (in fact, everyone except Mohamed Fayed) that, no, she and Dodi had no plans to marry and he had never bought her an engagement ring.

"HOW THE BUTLER HAS BETRAYED DIANA'S MEMORY", screamed an outraged *Express* the next day. "By cashing in with another book of so-called revelations about the late Princess, the former butler has destroyed what remains of his reputation… He was enjoying the trappings of his betrayal last night as he fled Britain for his luxury American holiday home… Do you think Paul Burrell has betrayed Diana?... calls cost 25p from a BT landline."

A week later, on 11 September, the *Express* struck back with a butler of its own. "Diana Was So Much In Love: Champagne was on ice to celebrate her engagement the night she died, says butler", was the paper's headline over news that Fayed's servant, Rene Delorm, had suddenly recalled being telephoned by his boss on the night of the Paris crash to tell him: "I'm going to propose to the Princess tonight."

"I plan to publish a new book to coincide with the anniversary telling the story that I couldn't tell before," announced Delorm, whose *Diana and Dodi: A Love Story* was published in August 1998. "It will leave the world in no doubt that Diana and Dodi were in love and planned to marry."

Next to this "revelation" was yet another dig at the *Express*'s former source: "Is Burrell just cashing in on Diana's memory? Calls cost 25p from a BT landline…"

Not that Paul Burrell has enjoyed a smooth ride at the rival *Mail* stable either. "Diana hated Burrell," the *Mail on Sunday* exclusively revealed in October 2003, (shortly after another tabloid, the *Daily Mirror*, had bought up the last batch of suddenly-recalled memories by the princess's former butler).

"He rifled through her belongings, read her post and told his friends about her underwear. She despised his snooping, refused to speak to him for weeks at a time and wanted to sack him… Paul Burrell has cynically tried to cash in on every memory of Diana… even her fears about being killed in her car."

For good measure the paper "outed" him as well: "Burrell was known as 'Barrackroom Bertha' because of his affairs with soldiers."

But memories, like loyalties, are shortlived in the Street of Shame; and last week the rag proudly put all that unpleasantness behind it and presented its readers with another "World Exclusive" – the serialization of Barrackroom Bertha's latest cynical cash-in, his new book *Diana: The Way We Were*.

TALKING THROUGH URANUS

***DAILY Mail* astrologer Jonathan Cainer, Fleet Street's highest-paid hack, is having problems with his predictions thanks to those all-too-predictable print deadlines.**

On 16 August he noted the debate raging among scientists about whether Xena is a planet or an asteroid. "Some people have been seriously suggesting it is not a planet – and that Pluto isn't one either, even though it has been treated as such for more than 75 years. Top astronomers are now meeting to discuss this thorny question. It looks as if they are about to confirm that Pluto *is* a planet, and they are also about to confer full planetary status on Xena. Surprisingly, they also look set to give planetary status to Ceres, the large body discovered in 1801, and Charon, Pluto's Moon. This is amazing. It implies many things…"

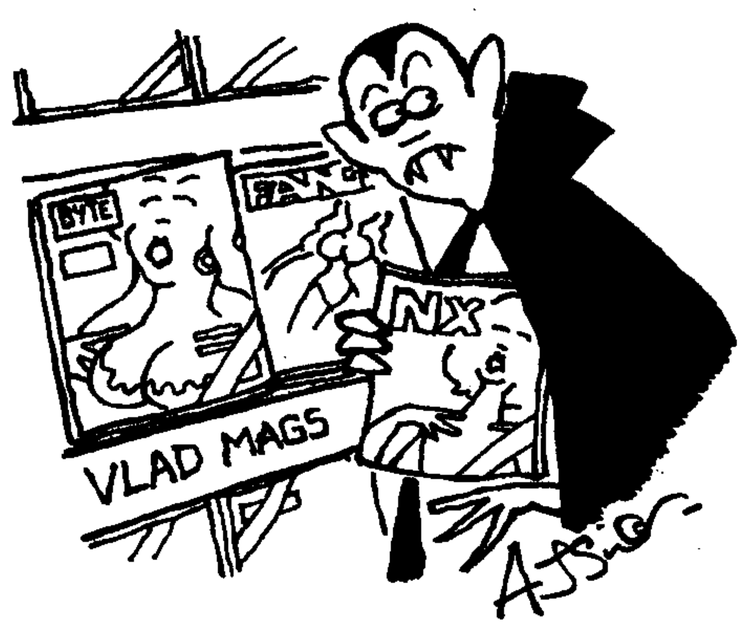
On Tuesday 22 August, tension was building. "Once we had celestial symmetry... All that changed after 1781, when Uranus was discovered. After years of experimentation, astrologers attributed it to Aquarius. The 1846 discovery, Neptune, was eventually given to Pisces. By the 1950s we were confident that Pluto belonged to Scorpio. So what will Ceres, Xena and Charon end up ruling?"

By the following day Cainer had all the answers. "In Prague on Friday, members of the International Astronomical Union will vote on whether to create a new class of planet called a Pluton. They are expected to rubber-stamp this proposal. Will Plutons 'rule' zodiac signs? They will have to because Pluto, the ruler of Scorpio, is among them. There are, though, as I explained yesterday, only two vacancies for new ruling planets – yet we have three candidates. Arguably, Charon, Pluto's twin, co-governs Scorpio, leaving Ceres for Virgo or Gemini and Xena for Taurus or Libra. Problem solved? Not quite. More Plutons are sure to be announced soon."

Alas! Cainer had got his dates mixed up, and his predictions entirely wrong. On Thursday 24 August the astronomers decided that Pluto wasn't a planet and there weren't going to be any new classes of planets, or Plutons, called Ceres, Charon or Xena either.

Unfortunately, Saturday's *Daily Mail* Weekend supplement had already gone to press, containing Cainer's joy at exactly the opposite occurring. "As I predicted on BBC2 a few weeks ago, scientists have accepted, as a planet, the new discovery 2003 UB313," he raved. "That's Xena to the likes of you and me. They have also reclassified Ceres, the asteroid, as a planet – and declared that Pluto's Moon, Charon, is a planet too. By tradition, we astrologers defer to the decisions of astronomers. If they say a heavenly body is important, we treat it with respect, even if previously we have all but ignored it. It's going to take us a while to learn to read these new dials on our dashboard but, eventually, you'll start to see us make even more accurate predictions."

No we won't!



CALLED TO ORDURE

TONY Blair has long had a fetish about using schools for photo opportunities. Remember when he descended on a London school assembly and had 300 pupils (plus the Westminster press corps) sing a hymn of adulation before he announced the 2001 general election?

Last week he was at it again, using children for political ends. Needing a backdrop for his declaration that he would be gone within the year, Blair chose Quintin Kynaston, a "pathfinder" specialist technology school in north London. Once again it all went disastrously wrong.

Blair's imminent arrival sent the school staff into overdrive. Many pupils were told to go home at lunchtime, ostensibly to allow "staff training". However, one teacher sidled up to journalists and said: "There's no staff training going on today – they just want the school orderly so that Blair gets a good impression."

The prime minister's security-conscious plans had got out and local peaceniks soon started to drift towards the school gates. The children who had been turfed out of school thus found themselves being handed "Tony Must Go" placards and "Stop the Killing" banners. Being kids, they were delighted and proved enthusiastic learners when grungy activists from Stop the War and the International Socialist Resistance started to teach them protest chants.

A well-marshalled, high-pitched chorus of "Blair out! Troops out!", orchestrated by a scruffy man in a red t-shirt, was soon filling the air in St John's Wood and members of the Quintin Kynaston staff room hared round the front yard trying to confiscate a mushrooming number of anti-Blair posters.

Some of the bolder children had fun flicking V-signs at the TV cameras. Jon Craig from Sky News was admonished by a female teacher for laughing. The deputy headmaster was pursued by a freelance cameramen who was demanding an interview. A blameless, lone Middle East protester was hauled off to one side by a senior policeman and cautioned for holding up two Lebanese flags little bigger than the things you'd find on a diplomat's car. "You're clearly demonstrating," barked the copper, demanding the man's ID.

With the press corps desperate for copy (Blairite spin doctors were playing their usual game of denying most reporters access to the big announcement) the children found themselves being interviewed for their political views. Amy Simmonds, 15, proved especially helpful, telling hacks that she thought: "Blair has messed up the country and is totally up George Bush's arse, know what I mean?" Her words were faithfully noted. Several urchins also concluded that Blair was a "total dickhead". Teachers looked on in miserable dismay, wishing they had been allowed to keep the rabble inside.

A van screeched up and two muscular men in hoodies began unloading crowd control barriers, crashing the things down on to the pavement in a melodramatic manner – and, in the process, nearly crushing the feet of an astonished Nick Robinson from the BBC. The rolling news channels were by now all up and running, enjoying the skirmish immensely.

One member of the Blair entourage took issue with the Stop the War activists, telling them they were "setting a bad example" and "manipulating children". Within seconds the man had lost his temper and was telling the activists to "just fuck off!" – right in front of the very kids he was trying to protect. An anti-Blair teaching assistant arrived with scores of political pamphlets criticising the school. Strains of "God Save the Queen" were now rising from the children as they were pushed 30 yards down the road by a reinforced police presence.

When Blair and Education Secretary Alan Johnson finally arrived the mayhem had abated, but that did not stop loud boos and farting noises from greeting the prime minister.

TV viewers, later that evening, saw the PM make his actorly announcement with some well-behaved children standing behind him. Could it possibly be the same school? It could. A handful of youngsters had been selected to meet Blair inside Quintin Kynaston and were, needless to say, very much better behaved than the Bash Street kids outside.

In an email leaked later to Iain Dale's political blog, headmistress Jo Shuter criticised the anti-war activists who joined the crowd. "We were horrified that our children had been exploited by a political organisation," she wrote. "The children were merely fodder for a political campaign."

Clearly blind to the fact that her pupils had just been exploited by Tony Blair, Ms Shuter concluded: "I personally remain a big supporter of Tony Blair who I personally feel is a man of integrity and honesty."

'Gavel Basher'

Number crunchings

7 ■ Number of junior members of government who resigned in "not our finest hour" for which Tony Blair apologised

22 ■ Number of British servicemen killed in Afghanistan and Iraq in same week (no apology)

DRAMATIC LICENCE

IT WAS, the columnists agreed, a week of high drama. They did, however, have some difficulty agreeing on which one.

Joe Joseph in the *Times* noted that "Brown looked jolted, and wrong-footed, by the reaction to his apparent treachery, like the protagonist of a Shakespearean tragedy."

"It was ever thus, I hear you say," wrote Stephen Glover in the *Daily Mail*. "Brutus and Cassius plunged the dagger into mighty Caesar, who had been their adored master."

Over in the *Independent*, Matthew Norman mused that: "If Gordon views himself as Bolingbroke rising to seize Richard II's throne on a wave of public affection, small wonder that the recent slump in his own approval ratings has drained what little reserves of patience he had left."

Fie! Fie! insisted Jonathan Freedland in the *Guardian* – "Like Hamlet, the week's drama featured intrigue, jealousy, ambition and betrayal in a tale of kings, heirs and a fateful vacillation" – only to be swiftly corrected by a reader's letter: "Just who does Brown think he is? Macbeth?"

Get with the beat, daddy-o, said the *Sunday Times*'s Simon Jenkins: "Downing Street has never so resembled a *West Side Story* knife fight between the Sharks and the Jets, with a plaintive rendering of I Want To Be in America from the master of No 10." In the *Guardian,* Simon Hoggart was equally bang up-to-date: "The past week in politics has reminded me of one of the most famous scenes in movies, the very end of Hithcock's *North by Northwest*." His colleague Barbara Toner meanwhile opted for a showtune. "I went to see the revival of the Lloyd Webber musical last week and there he was: the star's understudy singing Don't Cry For Me Argentina. I thought, make her a man, swap Argentina for All You Voters and it's Tony Blair."

And for perhaps the first time in history Samuel Beckett provided headlines for both the *Independent* and *Scottish Daily Mirror*, respectively "Endgame" and "Waiting for Gordo".

JOINED-UP GOVERNMENT

31 August: "Running the NHS is not like Tesco, where you can have a head office and lots of stores and can tell them to sell beans at 40p a can," announces Nic Greenfield, deputy director-general of workforce at the Department of Health, in *People Management* magazine.

31 August: New director-general of workforce appointed at the Department of Health – "Clare Chapman, currently the group personnel director of Tesco."

HEALTH CHEQUE-UP

MORE news reaches the *Eye* on this summer's most embarrassing Department of Health cock-up – when an advertisement putting the NHS's commissioning work up for sale was swiftly withdrawn due to "drafting errors".

According to a member of the department, the notice, which went in the official European journal for government contracts, was written by commercial director Ken Anderson after he had attended a meeting with some large private health companies – returning with a draft notice and declaring "I want this out by Friday and don't change a fucking word". No minister or other senior official was consulted.

The advert duly went out, asking for applications from firms with experience of managing a healthcare commissioning budget of "at least £300m". Firms like United Health Europe, perhaps, whose president is Simon Stevens, the prime minister's former health adviser.

A predictable furore ensued and a humiliated Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt was forced to apologise and withdraw the notice. Asked about the events leading to the u-turn, a health department spokesman said: "We are not getting drawn into hearsay, gossip and tittle-tattle." So, not a denial then.

Anderson is rumoured to be looking for opportunities outside the NHS as his star wanes following this fiasco and an unimpressive performance before a parliamentary health committee on his independent sector treatment centres. How much greater the opportunities would be if the private sector had billions-worth of commissioning work…

DRAKE'S PROGRESS

BACK in 1996 (*Eye* 895) questions were asked about Christopher Tye, head of the business branch of the then Lord Chancellor's Department, who went off to work for bailiffs Drakes.

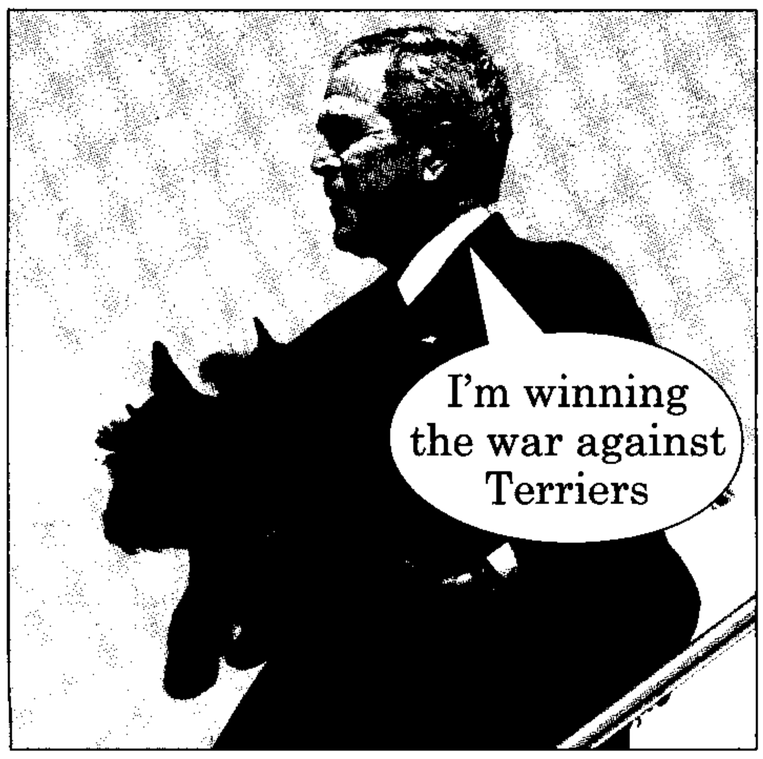
Former Labour MP Martin Redmond took those questions to the minister responsible and was told there was no conflict of interest as Mr Tye had had "no dealings" with Drakes Group, but it was later revealed he had indeed attended a meeting involving the firm.

Fast forward to this April, when Drakes Group won the contracts to be the sole fines enforcement agency for magistrates courts in the London, south-east, south-west and north-west regions – four of the seven regional contracts available.

We know which officials from what's now the Department for Constitutional Affairs (DCA) were involved in the tendering process, because an application was made for a judicial review of the awarding of one of the contracts. The judgment for that case reads: "The tenders for this Region's contract were marked separately by Mr Harding… and by two national officials on the panel, Mr Ian Wallace and Mrs Lesley Pyne."

Ian Wallace, who was an official at DCA, now works at Drakes. The DCA told the *Eye* that: "Appropriate measures were put in place to ensure there were no issues of concern when Mr Wallace joined Drakes some months after the contract was awarded." Plus ça change…

BUSH DEFENDS RECORD



DEFENCE NEWS

MANY newspapers noted that the Nimrod spy plane which crashed in Afghanistan, killing the 14 servicemen on board, was introduced in the 1970s and its replacement was years overdue. But *why* are the MRA4 upgrades for the Nimrod so late and who is to blame?

The answer can be found in the latest National Audit Office (NAO) "major projects report" which investigates government purchases of military kit. It reveals that the contract for the new Nimrod Maritime Reconnaissance and Attack Mark 4 (MRA4) plane was given to BAE Systems in 1996. The deal involves extensively refurbishing old planes with new wings, engines and systems, rather than building fresh ones from scratch.

So far the contract is £996m over cost – even though the number of planes was reduced from 21 to 12; and BAE has paid the Ministry of Defence (MoD) a reported £250m to compensate for the delays, although this has still left the budget massively inflated. (Investors actually felt BAE had got off lightly with this fine, and the firm's share price rallied when the compensation deal was announced in 2003.)

The planes are set to arrive more than seven years late. They should have been given to the RAF in April 2003 and are not now expected until 2010. The NAO says the government is responsible for 12 months of this extra delay because it dithered about how many planes it actually wanted in 2005. However, all the rest of the delays are because of "resource and technical factors at BAE Systems leading to programme slippage".

Investigators have yet to determine the cause of the recent crash, but with the MoD denying a successful Taliban shootdown, suspicions must turn to technical faults on the ageing planes.

The current Nimrod MR2s have an "out of service date" of 2011, but some may have to fly beyond then, requiring extra maintenance. Oddly enough, while BAE Systems is responsible for the late arrival of the new planes, it actually won the contract to keep the old ones in the air. In July Defence Secretary Des Browne gave the firm a £65m contract to keep Nimrod MR2s flying until 2011, while waiting for BAE to finally deliver the Nimrod MRA4s.

Number crunchings

14 ■ Number of terrorist suspects George W. Bush has admitted were detained in CIA prisons in Europe since 9/11

1000 ■ Number of undeclared CIA flights European Parliament concluded took place over Europe since 2001

LABOUR CONFERENCE SPECIAL

DELEGATES to the Labour party conference in Manchester may be looking forward to big changes at the top, but on the fringes it will be business as usual.

The big corporations will be out in force, rubbing shoulders with ministers at the usual round of self-interested meetings masquerading as policy discussions...

Junk food

Thanks to the Social Market Foundation, a think tank that acts at conference time like a speed-dating agency for ministers and corporate suits, Schools Minister Jim Knight will talk about "a whole school approach to nutrition and activity" at a meeting paid for by Kraft foods. Kraft of course produces those heavily-processed Dairylea Dunkers and Dairylea Lunchables that are designed to replace home-made sandwiches in school children's packed lunches.

Food firms like Kraft are keen to counterbalance "activity" against "nutrition", hoping that a few nods towards sport plus some food education will divert attention from the high number of calories in their Toblerones and Chocolate Oranges.

Private healthcare

The Social Market Foundation is also arranging for Health Minister Andy Burnham to speak on "regulating standards in healthcare" at a meeting sponsored by BUPA. Whether the minister mentions the fine given to BUPA after it admitted poor care standards that contributed to the death of a resident at a care home in Kent remains to be seen.

Mobile phones

Lord Sainsbury meanwhile will discuss how the media should respond to science "scare stories" at a meeting sponsored by the Mobile Operators Association. He will speak alongside the trade body's own Mike Dolan.

The phone operators are keen to get Labour onside in the many local battles they face to get their phone masts built; and conference will host a rash of other ministers-and-mobiles meetings too. Financially challenged "3 mobile" is sponsoring a separate get-together with Culture Minister Tessa Jowell (in charge of telephone regulator Ofcom) and Home Office Minister Liam Byrne. O2 meanwhile is paying for a meeting with Jowell hosted by another Labour-linked think tank, the Institute for Public Policy Research.

Train subsidies

Transport Minister Stephen Ladyman is due to appear courtesy of the Go Ahead Group to talk about the environmental impact of transport. He will be joined by Go Ahead's £500,000-a-year chief executive Keith Ludeman, who will presumably say that the government needs to keep throwing millions in subsidies at his train and bus firm to stop global warming.

Petrochemicals

Energy Minister Malcolm Wicks is worried about the environment and so will address a meeting that will attempt to answer the question: "Is their light at the end of the tunnel for energy policy?" Alas, the light at the end of Wicks's tunnel appears to be an oil-burning one. His meeting will be paid for by the UK Petrol Industry Association, made up of big oil refiners like BP, Shell and Esso.

Pension profits

A host of bankers and other financial types are also paying for ministerial meetings. Standard Life, for example, is sponsoring Social Market Foundation fringe events with Health Minister Patricia Hewitt, Treasury Secretary Ed Balls and Trade Minister Ian McCartney. No doubt the bank – whose directors include Tory Lord Blackwell – will want to talk to ministers about making sure Labour's proposed National Pensions Savings Scheme doesn't undercut its own profits. The firm may be less keen to talk about its own falling endowment and pension payments, however.

Social housing

Abbey National is backing a chinwag on social housing with Housing Minister Yvette Cooper (Abbey is already making millions from Labour's social housing policies by investing in the housing associations that take over council house properties.)

Nuclear power

The board of the British Nuclear Group has decided to pay public money for a Social Market Foundation invitation-only party for MPs and delegates ("featuring special guest, band and prizes!") The state-owned company made such a hash of running Sellafield that it is about to be dismembered and privatised. However, the directors could hang on to a few well-paid jobs and the odd jolly for MPs can't hurt.

BLUNKETT'S STANDARDS

A BIZARRE announcement in the *Daily Mail* on 1 September. "We have been asked to make it clear that David Blunkett did not breach the rules of the advisory committee on business appointments when he became a columnist on a national newspaper as our story on 26 July suggested. Mr Blunkett did consult the committee, though he did not wait until the committee replied before going ahead. We apologise to Mr Blunkett if we misinterpreted the committee's report and comments."

It takes rare chutzpah, even by his standards, for Blunkett to demand such an apology. The committee's latest annual report notes that "in the course of the year we confirmed that our advice had not been sought by a former minister about two appointments that he had recently taken up". Though he isn't named, the miscreant was none other than Blunkett. It was his failure to tell the committee about his job with DNA Biosciences (a clear breach of the rules) that triggered his resignation last autumn. But what of the *Sun* job? The offending *Mail* article of 26 July reported that Blunkett and two other ex-ministers "took jobs without getting the approval of the advisory committee". While noting that ministers are not required to follow the committee's advice, it suggested that Blunkett "again stretched the spirit of the ministerial code of conduct" – which he did, even if he didn't breach it.

Given his history of breaking the letter as well as the spirit of the code, you might think he'd keep mum on the subject. You might also wonder why the *Mail* capitulated so lamely.

FACT TO REMEMBER: At a 2003 dinner celebrating Paul Dacre's editorship of the *Daily Mail*, the toast was proposed by one D. Blunkett, who revealed that he was proud to count Dacre "as a friend" since "he actually reflects the best of journalism".

BRITISH TROOPS

WITH two soldiers dead in Afghanistan's Helmand province in the past fortnight alone, the Royal Irish Regiment is simultaneously starting to say goodbye to the first batch of the 3,000 infantrymen whose redundancies were announced last year, during "Doctor" John Reid's brief stint at the MoD.

Perhaps noting the absurdity of sacking soldiers when it's proving impossible to get new recruits, this summer the MoD offered a £20,000 re-enlistment bonus – a golden "hello again" – for men who have already banked their £28,000 redundancy cheques but are prepared to forgive and forget (see *Eye* 1164). Only about 1 percent has taken the MoD's cash so far, not least because anyone prepared to venture to Basra or Kabul can earn five or six times army wages by joining a private security company.

That isn't the only incentive to go private. As the death toll among serving soldiers rises, fatalities among those working in the private sector appear to be diminishing. The likeliest explanation is that Sandline, Control Risks, Olive and the rest now have much better equipment than the army, especially when it comes to armoured vehicles.

ME TV

Autumn Schedules (all channels)

THE buzz-phrases at this year's Edinburgh International Television Festival – the annual gathering of the broadcasting barons – were "brand impact" and "rights tail".

The argument runs that when, in the near-future, television stops coming in to a box in the living room and starts being streamed into lap-tops and mobiles and MP3 players for downloading, TV will have to compete with all the other "content" (a current buzzword) which floods across these devices.

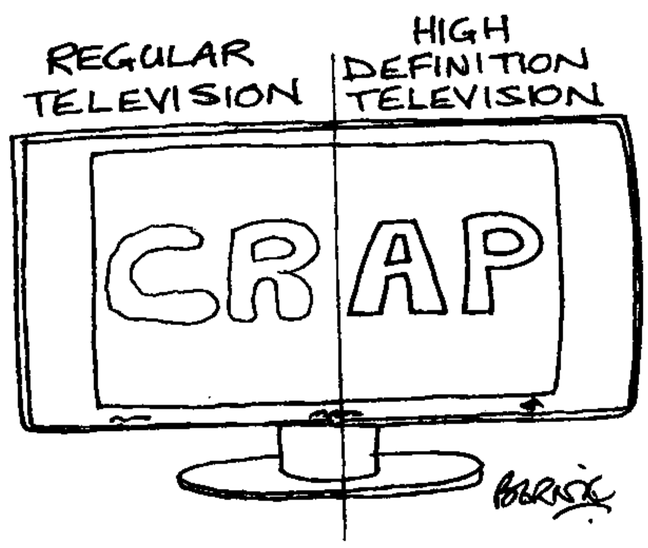
The received wisdom is that the broadcasters best able to survive in this screen free-for-all will be those whose content is easily recognisable (brand impact) or who have a substantial back-catalogue of material to be sold on-line (rights tail). Unfortunately for viewers, what this means in translation is that the trick is to make more and more episodes of the same old stuff or, failing that, stuff which might be mistaken for the same old stuff.

Such fears are certainly confirmed by examination of the schedules for September, the month when new programmes are traditionally released. It's like going back to school and finding you're still in the same year.

Celebrity Masterchef (BBC1) returns for another run, lasting an astonishing 15 weeks, although, if the programme were a tin of food, it would have been thrown out years ago.

There is a third series for **Life Begins** (ITV1), which clearly illustrates the drawbacks of relying too heavily on established brands. The Caroline Quentin drama was, in its first series, a reasonable comedy about the aftermath of a divorce, but a third series has only been possible through the old conceit of, yes, getting the divorced couple back together again.

There is also a third series for **Who Do You Think You Are?,** which moves from BBC2 to BBC1, in the hope of shoring up a channel short of hits; but the pressure of the new slot already shows in the decision to begin with Barbara Windsor, one of the queens of the network. The worry is that a previously quirky series may become like *This is Your Life* or *Parkinson*, a common-room for the channel's star performers.



A sign of the desperation to exploit recognisable products is that even apparently self-contained programmes are now getting follow-ups. Last year, Channel 4 had an excellent little documentary series about suicide bombers, which said all there was to say about the phenomenon. But, just because there might be viewers who would tune in for more, here, God help us, comes **Cult of the Suicide Bomber II**.

Even the supposedly new material turns out to have been commissioned for easy familiarity. **Blackbeard (BBC1)**, the big Sunday night drama, is a sort of *Pirates of the Caribbean 2 and a Half*, in which James Purefoy as the notorious pirate is even made-up and dressed to look like Johnny Depp's Jack Sparrow. **Ian Wright's Unfit Kids** (ITV1) is a shameless Jamie Oliver-rip-off, in which a footballer famous for thick remarks tries to make schoolchildren thin.

Another way to easy recognition is the anniversary tie-in, always a catching habit in television but now pandemic. **Aberfan: The Untold Story** (BBC1) seems a remarkably brave title, given that the story of the Welsh landslide disaster is told on television at least once every 10 years and perhaps even five.

But one American news event has come to be regarded by producers as the golden anniversary. So **9/11 - The Towers** (BBC1) jostles for opportunistic nostalgia with **The Path to 9/11** (BBC2), **9/11: Out of the Blue** (Five) and **The Man Who Predicted 9/11** (C4). Only ITV1 has no memorial show running on the fifth anniversary of the day itself but, given the current state of the channel, this is more likely to be absent-mindedness than restraint.

Confirming why chief executive Charles Allen was forced to go, the once-great commercial channel proves to have schedules so threadbare that the big event is the zillionth run of **Who Wants to be a Millionaire?**, while a shameful three and a half hours of the first non-holiday weekend of the autumn is filled with **TV's 50 Greatest Stars**, a desperate clip-and-quip show.

Allen, in his speech at Edinburgh, promised major dramas later in the year but, in fact, these are **Prime Suspect**, **Cracker** and the Morse spin-off **Lewis**, all shows which have their roots around 20 years ago.

All of these so-called "new" programmes – sorry, content – will doubtless help the networks develop "brand impact" and a "rights tail"; but the main impact on most viewers will be to make them want to tail it from the sofa and feel very far from content.

'Remote Controller'

GOING LIVE

"Let's go over to Jon Sopel now, who's in another part of Westminster altogether."

– Huw Edwards, presenting a BBC News special on Tony Blair's resignation announcement from College Green outside parliament, hands over to a colleague standing 250 yards away on Parliament Square, News 24, 7 September.

"We've been told Gordon Brown will arrive here sometime before two, and we're hoping he is going to say something."

– Edwards commentates on coverage of an empty car park in Glasgow.

"We're still looking at these pictures of Tony Blair… Well, waiting for him to arrive. Very useful to have these aerial images, giving us an idea of what progress is being made."

– Edwards reviews lengthy helicopter shots of a street in north London where, as yet, the Prime Minister isn't.

JUST FANCY THAT!

The BBC's news website explores the fine art of understatement in its coverage of the situation in Lebanon on 4 September.

Watch more video news:
WORLD
The UN has said that Hezbollah and Israel have accepted its offer to mediate in the row over two captured Israeli soldiers.

"Row"? It's a good job it didn't escalate into a quarrel then.

DUMB BRITAIN

Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: Which English duke commanded the army that defeated Napoleon at the battle of Waterloo?

Contestant: Edinburgh.

Robinson: Before he became Holy Roman Emperor, Charlemagne was king of whom, the Franks or the Brunos?

Contestant: The Brunos.

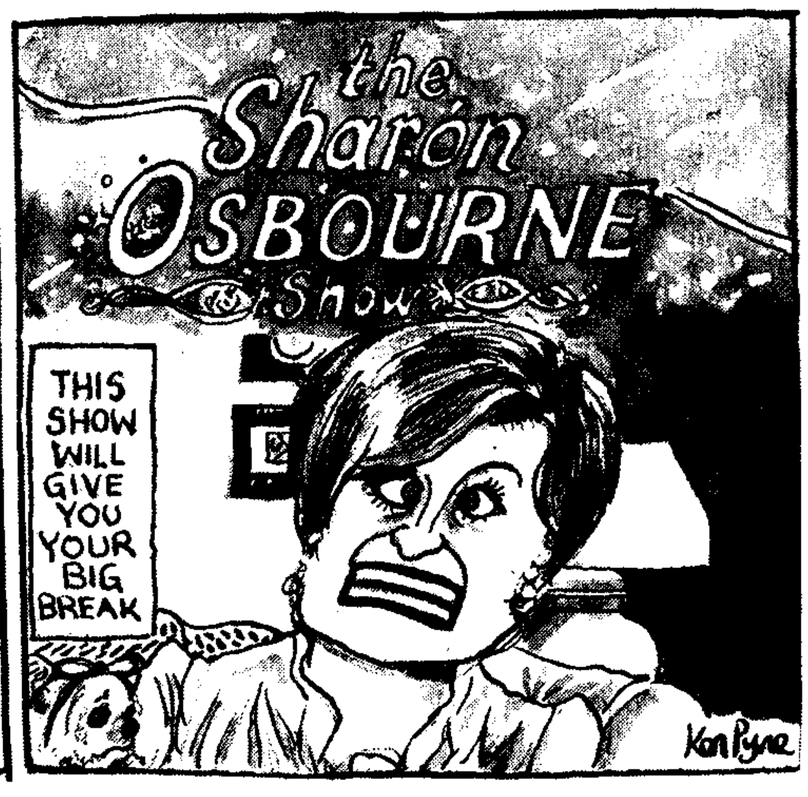
Robinson: The seven stars in the formation referred to as "the Plough" are part of the constellation called "the Great..." what?

Contestant: Gatsby.

Steve Wright's Big Quiz, Radio 2

Wright: The mythical minotaur had the body of a man and the head of a what?

Contestant: Millipede.



MEDIA NEWS

THE fact that the *Panorama* investigation into the murder of Jill Dando was presented by the "serial robber" Raphael Rowe who has several criminal convictions to his name, including one for malicious wounding, was quickly noticed by the BBC's critics in the press.

His violent past may explain why nobody has so far reported that so much of his reporting is actually itself stolen from other sources.

Rowe's *Panorama* set out to tell us something new about Barry George's conviction for the murder of Jill Dando. Despite costing an astonishing £250,000, it didn't get close. Much was made by Rowe of a small speck of explosive material found on a coat taken by police from George's flat. Rowe "revealed" that this evidence could have been contaminated. In fact he'd nicked the entire story from a five-month old copy of the *Daily Mail*.

Rowe also made much of the obsession George was supposed to have with Dando – again, a story pinched from Associated News five months before. His allegation that the jury's deliberations at a hotel may have been improper was also nicked, this time from that bastion of investigative journalism, the *Express on Sunday*, who ran it months ago.

And Rowe's "sensational" interview with a juror who was "disgusted" with the conduct of the trial was also less than fresh, lifted as it was from an interview she gave to the *Sun* back in 2002.

HERE are the headlines in the "news menu" for the BBC *Six O'Clock News* on 4 September: British tourist shot in Amman; suicide bombing in Kabul; death of "crocodile hunter" Steve Irwin; and serial "shoe rapist" gets life.

It was such busy news day that two other big stories, the deaths of two British soldiers in Basra and the "blue on blue" killing of Canadian troops, strafed by mistake by the US air force, were not even included at the top of the programme.

But by far the biggest single item – running for at least six minutes – was a "Six on Tour" report from Christchurch in Dorset in which Natasha Kaplinsky focused on "retirement issues". While the rest of the world's media was on the phone to Amman, Kabul and Basra, Kaplinsky interviewed "a local Dorset historian". "Christchurch is basically a retirement community. People come here to retire," he said.

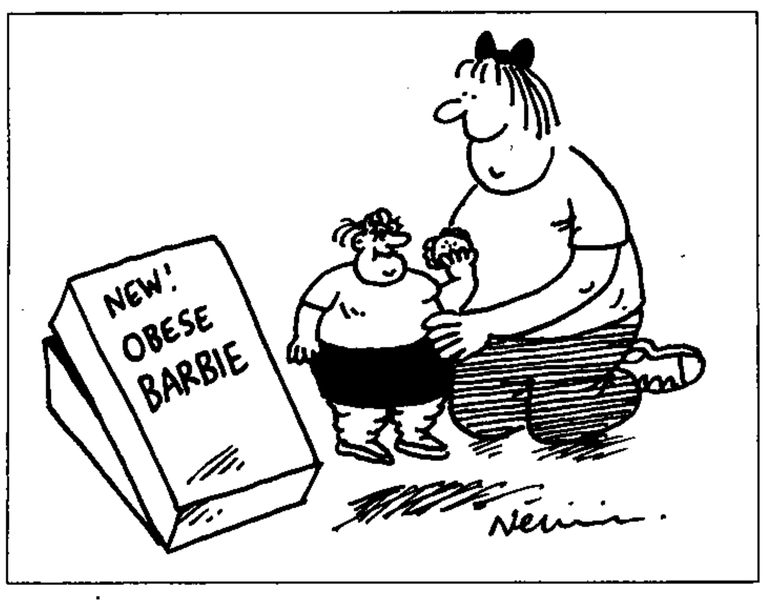
She also brought viewers up to date with the local weather. "It's very windy."

Handing back to the studio, the £120,000-a-year news anchor had time to squeeze in one more gem: "It's been great here in Christchurch – we've met some wonderful people, back to you George."

"I JUST can't remember the last time I watched a British drama," announced Ricky Gervais at the much-reported press launch of the new series of *Extras*.

"It was probably something like *GBH* [Alan Bleasdale's drama, broadcast in 1991]. It is not like I give them a go and turn them off, they just don't come into my vision."

This must have delighted his wife Jane Fallon, producer of two of the most successful drama series of the last decade, *This Life* and *Teachers*. Gervais was even employed as musical adviser on the former, in 1996 – a fact he now appears to have expunged from his CV.



THE FOG OF WAR

THERE is clearly a problem with the transmission of accurate and reliable information on the developing war in Afghanistan.

Some of this is the fault of the MoD (Arse) and NATO (Elbow) press offices, neither of whom seem to know what the other is doing when a big story breaks. But the media are also to blame.

Take the BBC's reaction to the news that an aircraft had crashed in southern Afghanistan with the loss of 14 service personnel. Peter Sissons (News 24) immediately instituted Operation Speculation: "It was either a fixed-wing aircraft, or possibly a helicopter," he decided, ruling out hot air balloons early on, but not a lot else.

Chris Bellamy, also in the studio, explained that: "We don't know what kind of aircraft it was."

"We'll leave it there for now, then," said Sissons, before concluding that the downed aircraft might have been a Hercules transport plane. This prompted anguished phone calls from the families of serving "Fat Albert" crews back at RAF Lyneham.

Minutes later, Paul Woods, the BBC's defence correspondent, popped up: "I'm getting strong guidance from a supposedly reliable defence source that it is not in fact a Hercules – we're talking about a Chinook here."

Cue anguished phone calls from the families of serving Chinook crews at RAF Odiham.

Cue also a torrent of complaints from those who expected a BBC correspondent to do more than report "guidance" from a "supposedly reliable", *single* source. This is, after all, contrary to the Beeb's post-Hutton modus operandi.

Over at Sky News meanwhile, a "defence expert" revealed that "of course it is possible that it could be a Lynx helicopter" that had crashed, ignoring the fact that you can't possibly cram 14 people into a Lynx. Dozens more anguished service families were nevertheless put through the emotional wringer.

When the news finally broke that the aircraft in question was a Nimrod MR2, ITV News ran a photo of a crashed, burning aircraft with its propellers bent and twisted by the impact. A Nimrod, of course is a *jet* aircraft.

Things were no clearer or more informative 24 hours later. Over at Sky News, a so-called "expert on Afghanistan from Chatham House", Ayesha Khan, told viewers that "the death of 15 military personnel was a devastating blow".

Cue anguished phone calls from families at the Nimrod's base, RAF Kinloss. Fourteen of their close relations and friends, not 15, had been killed.

PS: Actual plane-spotting skills were on display when Sky News' Robin Powell went to the Imperial War Museum at Duxford at the beginning of the month to cover "the largest gathering of Spitfire aircraft ever".

Alas, as Powell waffled on the camera zoomed on to a pair of Russian-made Yakovlevs, ignoring the many Spitfires available for the shot. After the break Sky went back to Duxford – just in time to film a Hurricane preparing for take off.

ANTHEA TURNER: Perfect Housewife

"First, steal your husband..."

I-SKY MYSPACE

"Justin Timberlake has kicked off a raunchy new craze with latest single Sexyback. Girls have inundated his record company with sackloads of risqué pictures of their naked spines. And thousands more have uploaded steamy photos to Justin's MySpace page. There are so many on there Justin has created a special slideshow to show how you should Rock Your Body with Style."

– The Sun *(prop. R. Murdoch) on MySpace (prop. R. Murdoch), 8 August.*

"How's this for a web sight! These cybare chicks all have pages on internet phenomenon MySpace – and as you'd imagine, they've got some impressive hits between them. The saucy six posted sizzling snaps of themselves on the making friends site which has 94 million members. And today we've got them in a line instead of online – proving their profiles are even better when you get them in the flash."

– The Sun *(prop. R. Murdoch) on MySpace (prop. R. Murdoch), 2 September.*

AD NAUSEAM

LAUNCHING a week after its Associated rival *London Lite*, News International's *thelondonpaper* needs to get advertisers on board and fast.

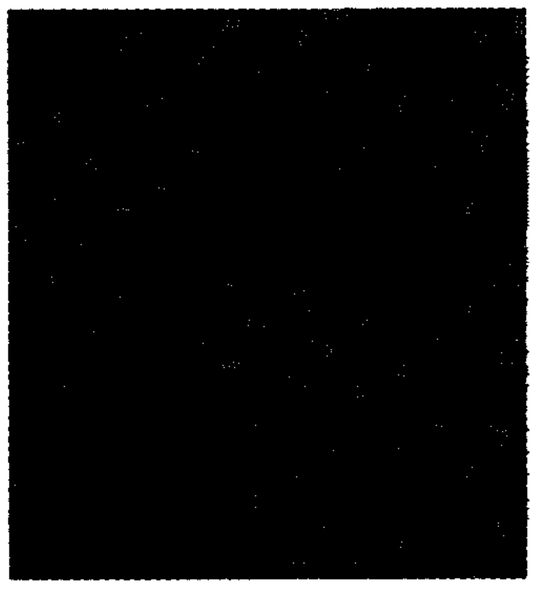
Its launch day web advertising was a great start. *thelondonpaper* bought banner spots on several media industry sites, hoping to attract advertisers. Unfortunately the click through took interested parties straight to the website of Haymarket, a rival publisher.

AFTER a 30-year relationship that has included several unforgettable adverts such as "Labour Isn't Working" and, er, all the other ones, the Tory Party and the Saatchi brothers have finally parted company.

With the revelations this time last year that Maurice Saatchi charged his own party £2.5m for his companies' work on the failed general election campaign without Michael Howard's knowledge, the only surprise is that it took so long.

Heading the race to rebrand the party in David Cameron's image is an ad agency called Karmarama. It promises "hard-working creative exellence [sic] for all our clients", and rather like Dave, it prides itself on being young, ethical and trendy. It sounds like the perfect match, but there might just be a sticking point. Karmarama felt so strongly about the Iraq war it designed its own "Make Tea, Not War" posters for the anti-war march. Whereas Cameron felt so strongly about it he voted in favour…

JUST FANCY THAT!



It does what it says on the bottle? How Lake Garda appears on a label for Valpolicella Superiore...

MEDICINE BALLS

4. Street Doctors

WOULD you let someone who claims to be a doctor examine you, without any pretence of privacy, on a crowded high street? And let it be filmed? Fortunately for the makers of *Street Doctors* (*The One Show*, BBC 1, September 4-8), there are plenty of people who will. But can you give informed consent to a televised medical ambush?

M.D.'s worst experience of this was presenting *As it Happens* for Channel 4, live from City Hospital in 1997. The producer was desperate to film cardiac resuscitation, and reckoned he could get consent too. "We put a two-minute delay on the filming and if the resuscitation's successful, we'll get the patient to sign the release form when he comes round." Mercifully, it never happened.

A year later, BBC 1 released *The Human Body*, fronted by Robert Winston, which managed to get a dying man to consent to filming his death, a BBC researcher to consent to thermal imaging of his erect penis and pregnant women awaiting terminations to consent to intra-uterine filming of fetal development.

In 2002, BBC 3 pushed the boundaries further with *Sex, Warts and All*, a much praised series on sexual health that somehow got patients to admit to having sexually transmitted infections *and* to show their genitals (warts and all) to the camera. As adviser Dr Rak Nandwani put it: "It's had a great impact in reducing the stigma of sexual health clinics, and has encouraged people to attend."

Destigmatization is the standard defence of all medical confession programmes, but rarely is much thought given to the consequences of such public exposure. On *Street Doctors*, a man at a fruit and veg market was found to have a blood pressure of 188/109, which is certainly worth knowing about. But do you want to share it with your employer or insurer?

In 2004, M.D. was asked to comment on the health of the "volunteers" for BBC1's *Fat Nation*, filmed live from a street in Birmingham. The producer had assembled a spreadsheet of coronary risk factors (blood pressure, cholesterol, smoking and diabetic status) that the inhabitants

"And cough"

had apparently consented to having read out on BBC1 when signing their release forms. The results were so shocking, with half the street likely to suffer a heart attack or worse in the next decade, that the item was dropped because it didn't fit in with the happy clappy "let's get fit together" ethos.

Back on *Street Doctor*, fruit and veg man is told his blood pressure is "8 out of 10" on a scale of badness, whatever that means. Another woman is told she might have rheumatoid arthritis as she leans on her burger bar and a boy is undressed to find he has "molluscum contagiousm" under his arm. "Nothing to worry about," claims Doctor Barbara, though whether he'll see it that way the morning after transmission is debatable.

Inevitably, a man takes his trousers off and squats on a bag of shallots to be examined, but more undignified was a man lying on a mat with his head on the kerb. Most of what gets dished out is reassurance, but medicine has a habit of dishing out nasty surprises and examining a pregnant woman in the middle of Bury market would be disastrous if the fetal heart beat were absent.

The GMC and BMA agree on very few things, but patient confidentiality is one of them. Bizarrely, one of the *Street Doctors* is George Rae, who in July came second in a vote to become chairman of the BMA and is now wandering around Manchester exhorting patients to strip off in public and "worry ye not". Come back Frankie Howerd.

M.D.

EDUCASHUN NEWZ

PAYROLL clerk Sharon Ebberson worked for the Royal School for Deaf Children in Marston, Kent, for several years before she started to suffer severe migraine-like headaches last September.

She was late for work on a few occasions because of the pain, and so to make up her time she worked late and through her breaks. Nevertheless in October she was called in by her boss for a formal disciplining and given a written warning.

As the headaches became worse, Mrs Ebberson grew confused, dizzy and nervous and was signed off work by a doctor in November. The school claims she then resigned. This followed a comment Mrs Ebberson made during what she took to be an informal chat on 9 December when she visited the school to explain her health situation to head teacher Wendy Eadsforth. She said she felt so sick that she "supposed" she would give up work. On 16 December she received a letter asking for her resignation in writing, plus return of all school keys and removal of her belongings from the office.

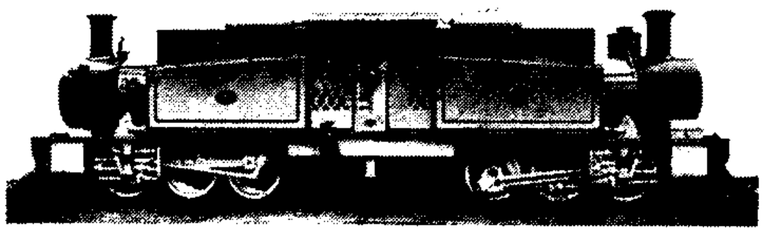
Mrs Ebberson's husband called the school to say, hang on, she never intended to resign, but on 21 December a further letter informed her that the school had accepted her verbal resignation and enclosed her P45.

On 6 January this year a CT scan found a massive brain tumour. For the past six months Mrs Ebberson has been through surgery and radiotherapy; and although the tumour is incurable it is now being controlled and she hopes to one day be well enough to work again.

However, even faced with the reality of her illness, the school has refused to back down and apologise for pushing her out of her job while she was sick or to say that if and when she's up to it, she can have her job back. The school's lawyers told the *Eye* that they had no comment. The case is due to be heard at Bury St Edmunds employment tribunal next month.

Spokeswoman Susan Seenan said: "We know from talking to patients and clinics that there is only one active sperm donor covering the whole of Scotland at the moment.

Glasgow Herald



SIGNAL FAILURES

Summer folly days

THIS summer many tourists got the message: the rail industry would be happier if they travelled by road in future or holidayed abroad.

Overcrowding isn't confined to London commuter trains. On some holiday routes this summer, for example, passengers were left behind and the lucky ones allowed on board were crammed amid a jumble of luggage. None of this will show up in statistics, however: overcrowding is only monitored on the biggest commuter networks.

On one occasion police were called to Grantham station, where a large crowd had become restless after being left behind by the inadequate Skegness train. This was Central Trains' tenth summer on the Skegness line. After the first, *Eye* 933 reported how Skegness trains were too short. Since then Central has had subsidy bailouts and its owner, National Express, has seen UK rail profits rise from about £2m to £64m in 2005.

One west Yorkshire couple wrote to the Eye after reading of a cyclist's futile efforts to reserve the recommended bike space with Arriva Trains Wales (*Eye* 1165). They had pulled off the feat and cycled to Rhyl station in good time for their afternoon train home on Sunday 13 August. The train had just two carriages, which had filled up in Llandudno. The couple's seat and bike "reservations" meant nothing to the guard, who refused to help the couple board. On the next train they had to stand while passengers squeezed past their bikes.

What do companies like ATW do with their trains on summer weekends instead of providing enough capacity on holiday routes? Fewer services are scheduled on Sundays than weekdays. All that's saved by not hitching spare carriages to the back is the extra fuel. Even that saving could be a mirage as many stations in tourist areas have no ticket barriers, or even ticket offices, and passengers travel free when aisles are so packed that guards can't sell tickets.

Network Rail regards holidays as the ideal time to shut lines for engineering (*Eyes passim*). For two summers it has refused to improve the Skegness line to reverse the effects of cost-cutting; and without better track, traditional locos and carriages (heavier than sprinter trains) can't be used to provide enough seats (*Eye* 1134).

In the predicted heatwaves, NR imposed speed restrictions because it couldn't be sure the tracks wouldn't buckle, especially on the Great Western mainline. Even when the tracks were OK, west-country services by new franchisee First Great Western were far from ideal. In the space of one hour on 26 June, for example, five services left Bristol for Weymouth, Portsmouth, Exeter and Taunton with just two carriages instead of the usual three or four. On other occasions trains skipped stations such as Weston-super-Mare to make up time. The Penzance-Paignton service was truncated more than once because of train faults.

"New" Labour has said it won't pay for trains "carting fresh air around the country". Summer is the time for rural railways to redeem themselves, but short or cancelled trains suppress demand. Ticket sales foregone because of overcrowding, or because replacement buses have no guard on board, make official passenger numbers look worse than they really are and increase the recorded subsidy per passenger. And those are the figures Whitehall bean-counters will quote next time the government tries to cut services.

THE 20th anniversary of bus deregulation is being celebrated with gridlock in Manchester. Last week local firm UK North put 12 buses per hour on to one route, to compete with Stagecoach's frequent services.

So many buses waited in the Piccadilly area that surrounding streets were jammed, trams cancelled and attendants told to slap parking tickets on loitering buses. As the law stands, UK North and Stagecoach have every right to bring Manchester to a halt, as long as they give eight weeks' notice.

Meanwhile hundreds of communities across Britain cry out for more buses, which wouldn't make big enough profits for bus firms. All of this is fine by Labour, which has spent nine years refusing to amend Mrs Thatcher's ill-conceived deregulation.

'Dr B Ching'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

GREAT WHITE NO-HOPES

JUST four months after the BNP won 11 seats on Barking & Dagenham council, the party is in disarray in the east London borough.

So disillusioned are some of its supporters, including at least four councillors, they have written to BNP leader Nick Griffin asking him to explain what has gone wrong. To quote precisely: "We were promised improvements from day one, what have we got? FUCK ALL."

The BNP being what it is, no one has risked signing the letter.

Predictably, chief among the gripes is the issue of race. Griffin is asked to explain "what happened to the promises and policies like if your not white, your not welcome" [*sic*] and the promise to "stop Muslims flying". Other concerns raised with Griffin include "where are the Free Creches for single parents to make them work" and "what happened to the free travel for indigenous pensioners".

The authors demand that local BNP gauleiter Richard Barnbrook be replaced by Cllr Robert Buckley, "a man of the people" with "no major skeletons in his cupboard". (Only minor ones, eh?) "Why is Barnbrook still in charge when he has clearly become an embarrassment, his gay porn film, giving a false address, offering easy relocation to firms in exchange for a Party donation, backhander more like. Threats to other BNP councillors and their supporters. We are becoming a laughing stock."

Meanwhile BNP councillor Claire Doncaster has been evicted from her Dagenham council flat for owing £2,000 rent. She has gone to live with her mum Sandra, also a BNP councillor, who is herself in trouble over non-payment of council tax.

Bloody scroungers!

DUCK OR GROUSE

THE Crispy Duck Chinese restaurant is still causing a headache for senior Westminster councillor Robert Davis – and not because of excess monosodium glutamate.

Eye 1165 reported how Tory Cllr Davis, a solicitor with West End law firm Freeman Box, had written to council officers asking them to try to get the Soho Society – the local residents' association – to drop objections to his client's application for a 50-seat extension. Now Westminster resident Shirley Greene has reported Cllr Davis to the Standards Board for England. Mrs Greene claims Davis was in breach of the local government code of conduct which states that a member "must not in his official capacity, or any other circumstance, use his position… improperly to confer on or secure for himself or any other person, an advantage or disadvantage…"

There is the Law Society's professional ethics code to consider too. It states: "You must decline to act where you… [hold] some public office or appointment as a result of which: (a) a conflict of interests, or a significant risk of a conflict, arises; or (b) the public might reasonably conclude that you, or your firm, had been able to make use of the office or appointment for the advantage of the client."

An interesting precedent might be the case of Cllr Alan Vincent, former Tory leader of Wyre Borough council in Lancashire, who was suspended for six months in 2004 by the Adjudication Panel for England. A practising solicitor, Vincent was found to have broken the code of conduct by representing a private client at a taxi-licensing hearing of his own council.

KELLY ZEROES

NEWHAM council has again had to call on the services of consultant Amanda Kelly, the borough's former head of legal, who last year produced a damning report on the shambles of Mayor Sir Robin Wales's pet project, Newham parks "constabulary" (*Eyes passim*).

Kelly is investigating allegations of corruption in the east London borough's housing department. An anonymous tip-off to East Ham MP Stephen Timms alleged that a £2m contract to renovate bed and breakfast accommodation used to house the homeless had gone to a firm linked to the landlord of the very same properties – thereby enabling him to improve his own properties at the taxpayers' expense, while making a tidy profit.

Kelly's inquiries are understood to be focusing on senior management; councillors were not aware of the deal. Last week the *Eye* attempted to interview Bob Takhar, boss of Ilford-based Manor Sales and Lettings, the firm allegedly at the centre of the inquiry, but he declined to answer any questions.

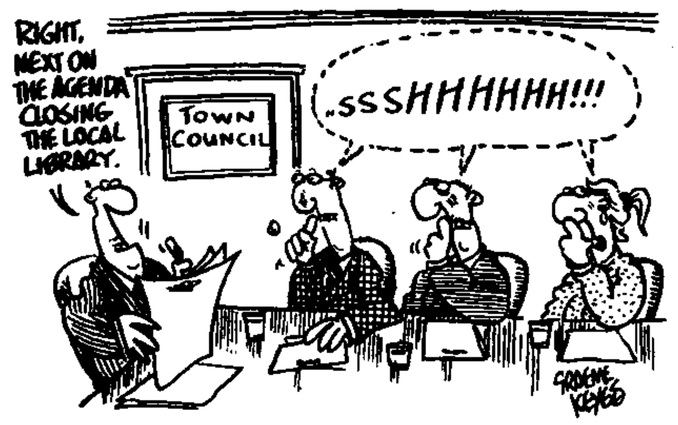
The new investigation is another headache for Mayor Wales's chum, deputy chief executive Chris Wood, who as well as overseeing the shambolic parks police has overall responsibility for housing.

SCULLY-DUGGERY

LABOUR'S attempts to recover some of its once unshakeable support in South Wales have suffered a blow with the news that the family of a veteran councillor stands to make millions on land purchased from his own council for less than £12,000.

In the 1990s Brian Scully, a member of Labour-controlled Blaenau Gwent council for 38 years, bought the land at Pant-y-Fforest, Ebbw Vale, for "grazing" purposes. No one else got a chance to bid. In answer to locals' concerns that the land might be built on, he said: "My personal position is clear. I am very much against the use of this land for any type of housing development as we need to retain areas of land for environmental purposes."

Nevertheless, in March this year ownership of the land was transferred to Scully's five children, who promptly submitted a planning application to erect 21 houses on the site, which was duly passed. As a refurbished rail link to Cardiff is due to open later this year, property prices in Ebbw Vale are on the rise. Neighbouring homes already sell for £190,000 – a small fortune in these parts. The clan Scully therefore is on course to make a profit of about £4m. Not bad for a bit of grazing land.



SO. FAREWELL then Newington Reference Library in the London borough of Southwark, which is to close because it's up too many stairs.

Southwark says the reference section, which is upstairs above the lending library, doesn't comply with disability discrimination law and as it's a listed building it's "hard to make changes". After all, it's not like they had years of warning about the law coming in… oh wait, they did.

Newington is Southwark's only proper reference department, so the books are going to be distributed around the rest of the lending library service. Not to worry though, as Southwark has a "modernisation plan" to allow library service members to get reference information online. Not quite the same...

● TORY Breckland council in Norfolk has spent £11.5m – exactly a quarter of its £46m reserve fund – buying the 260-acre Barnham Broom hotel and golf complex near Norwich. Council leader William Nunn says it is a brilliant investment which will top up council coffers and help keep council tax down. Locals are not so sure. Many believe the money could have been better spent on local issues such as improving sporting facilities and sorting out traffic problems in nearby Dereham. Most councillors are not happy because they feel Breckland's cabinet system means that only a favoured few were "in" on the deal, with the majority kept in the dark. They might not have voted so readily in favour of the scheme, they say, had they known that Barnham Broom's parent company, Daveney, is in dispute with HM Revenue and Customsover an unpaid £1.12m VAT bill. Enough to take the shine off Cllr Nunn's investment for some time if Breckland ends up having to pay it.

CRAPPY-CRAWLEY

STUDENTS at Chichester University will soon be able to embark on an MBA programme in "business and partnership" run in conjunction with West Sussex county council.

Perhaps the first partnership they might study is that of the council and contractors Edmund Nuttall, who were employed to work on the Crawley Fastway (*Eyes passim*) – possibly the most expensive bus lane in history.

Delivered at a cost of £2.65m per mile, the project went £10m over budget. Since coming on line buses on the route have suffered five accidents, the worst of which involved a bus coming plunging into a family's living room. Although drivers have repeatedly complained that the satellite navigation system which governs their timetables makes no allowance for traffic, they have been ignored. Luckily this doesn't bother regular passengers much because they are very few in number.

Inspired, no doubt, by this catalogue of successes, Cambridgeshire County Council has decided to employ Edmund Nuttall to build a Fastway connecting Cambridge and St Ives. Keith Walters, Tory leader of the council, has described the decision as "the most momentous the authority will ever make". Indeed. Even in the unlikely event of the scheme coming in on budget it will cost £116m – a million squid per mile more than the Crawley fiasco.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER

I MUST SAY THAT SAT NAV IS A CREATION OF GENIUS!
MALIGNED BY SOME, SEEN AS A SAFETY RISK BY OTHERS...
BUT YOU TRY NAVIGATING THE OUTER REACHES OF TATE MODERN WITHOUT ONE!
LEFT AT KANDINSKY'S 'TWO GIRLS', RIGHT AT CARL ANDRE'S 'EQUIVALENT VIII'...
FUTURISM

NOOKS and CORNERS

JOHN BETJEMAN, sainted founder of this column (in 1971), did not only support campaigns to preserve threatened buildings. He actively cared about much else – not least seaside piers.

One was that at Clevedon in Somerset, built in 1868-69. The elegant iron structure had partly collapsed and the local authority eventually proposed to demolish what remained. Local opinion, however, ensured that a public inquiry was held.

This was in 1980 when Betjeman was too ill to attend. Instead, he sent a tape-recording: "It recalls a painting by Turner, or an etching by Whistler or Sickert, or even a Japanese print. Without its pier Clevedon would be a diamond with a flaw." This did the trick: the pier was saved and restored.

In 2002 its listing was upgraded to grade I: "This pier is of outstanding importance for its delicate engineering and the relationship of pier to landward buildings, which creates an exceptionally picturesque group." Disgracefully, this group remains under threat.

In 2002, in *Eye* 1057, I discussed the proposal to demolish the Royal Pier Hotel at the head of the pier and replace it with a large and disgracefully mediocre block of flats designed by Atkins "Design, Environment & Engineering" of Bristol. Fortunately, local protest again ensured the project was called in and the Gothic Revival building was spot-listed.

To avoid a public inquiry, the owner, Mr Harvey Hill, then submitted a new scheme. This, with Mervyn Miller as consultant, was much better and retained much of the original building. Planning permission was granted in 2003. So far, so good… But nothing happened. The derelict Royal Pier Hotel continued to deteriorate and was occupied by squatters; a fire broke out… the usual story. North Somerset Council did absolutely nothing.

It may well be that building flats on the Cliffside site next to the pier is simply not viable. That, at least, was the conclusion reached by Crest Nicholson, a respectable housing developer brought in by the owner. Eventually, last June (after three years of inaction) the local authority was persuaded to issue a section 330 notice, a preliminary to serving a repairs notice.

And then, guess what? A new design was submitted to the council by the latest developer brought in by Mr Hill, Michael Wight Homes (only registered as a company in May this year). This is for a development of flats which is much bigger than that for which planning permission was granted in 2003 (27 units rather than 17); it is also much inferior as a design (yet again, by the wretched David Buckland of Messrs Atkins) and it grossly overshadows the remains of the Royal Pier Hotel. The scheme is also inept in that there is also no provision for a public right of way. Even so, supine North Somerset is minded to grant permission just to get rid of this long-running problem, even though there is no guarantee the developer will go ahead with the work.

In effect the people of Clevedon are back where they were in 2001. So much for the supposedly democratic planning process.

Rather than wait until the poor old Royal Pier Hotel collapses and Mr Harvey Hill is left with a nice cleared site, the council *ought* immediately serve a compulsory purchase order to allow restoration of the hotel building as a useful adjunct to the pier. After all, as Betjeman and English Heritage recognised, the landward building at Clevedon is an integral part of the aesthetic success of the pier. And if Mr Hill is serious about building something appropriate on this sensitive and difficult site, he should sack Atkins and hire a decent, conservation-minded architect.

CLEVEDON is not the only English seaside resort where people are furious about proposed developments. There is Sidmouth, that most salubrious and exclusive town in Devon which was another of Our Founder's favourites. "Tennis-girl queens of Sidmouth! What romances must have started over coffee in basket chairs in the lounge, or on the hotel court during a strenuous single!"

The building under threat here is not one of Sidmouth's elegant and often eccentric stuccoed Regency villas or terraces but a late Victorian

***pile: the Fortfield Hotel. Originally built as a private residence for Sir Joseph Leese QC, the MP for Accrington, in 1890-92, it is a jolly, eclectic example of Victorian seaside architecture, enlivened with timber verandahs and balconies. It lies by the sea at the end of (listed) Fortfield Terrace – "I doubt if anywhere on the south coast there is a prettier Georgian stucco crescent than Fortfield Terrace which overlooks the cricket ground and sea…" wrote Betjeman in his essay on Sidmouth in* First and Last Loves.**

The hotel is now closed and its owner, Andrew Torjussen, wants to demolish it and build a much larger hotel on the site – rectilinear, with lots of glass, and mediocre. The Victorian Society, SAVE Britain's Heritage and the Georgian Group all object. It is unlisted, but an important part of Sidmouth's seafront, and history; and it ought to be listed, not demolished. As Betjeman wrote: "No hideous jazz chain stores, nor gimcrack concrete cages defile the quaintness of its older quarters…" Not yet anyway.

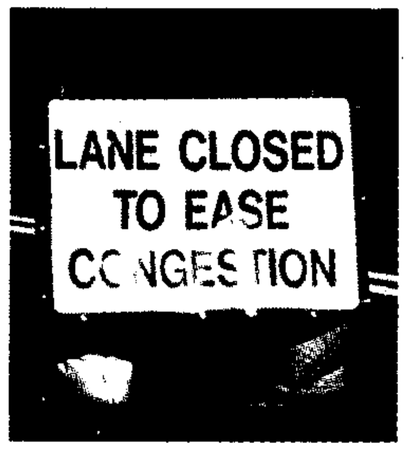
'Piloti'

● An exhibition, "First and Last Loves: John Betjeman & Architecture", sponsored by *Private Eye*, has just opened at Sir John Soane's Museum, Lincoln's Inn Fields.

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

Sex, nudity, drunken violence, body fluids, excrement, blasphemy – they've done it all.
HOXTON SQUARE
NEWS
GILBERT AND GEORGE: MAJOR RETROSPECTIVE AT TATE MODERN.
I wish they'd come up with something unconventional!



I-SPY

Cornwall

Submitted by Glen Hargreaves.

£10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

READING between the respectful lines in tributes to the late Sir John Drummond, former boss of Radio 3, the Proms, and the Edinburgh Festival, you only glimpse the truth: which is that, although a powerfully effective figure, Drummond was a bit of a monster.

Pompous, self-regarding, self-important, with a queenly temper and a nasty habit of fawning over the artistic and social elite, he bullied those without the clout to answer back, haranging and humiliating underlings in public.

Neither the suckings-up nor the dressings-down were comfortable to watch. And when, in retirement, he produced a gossip-riddled volume of autobiography, it wasn't comfortable to read as alternate pages of self-justification, vitriol and toe-curling sycophancy brought his various regimes back into focus.

Drummond couldn't lose his spectacles without informing you that he must have dropped them down the Queen Mother's sofa ("I expect she'll ring to tell me"). And who could forget the pre-concert interviews he liked to do with famous musicians where the musician scarcely got a word in edgeways? They invariably turned into motor-driven monologues where Drummond talked about himself for 20 minutes, periodically congratulating Claudio Abbado or whoever on the role allotted them in Drummond's life. It was absurd. Indeed, it became *so* absurd that you almost forgave him and laughed.

His chief claim to forgiveness, though, was that he also turned his sharp tongue and his fierceness on some deserving candidates, particularly the feeble men in suits who run the BBC. Unlike them, he stood his ground and fought attempts to undermine what Radio 3 stood for. In Drummond's day there was no compromise. Now it's a spineless, popularist muddle.

The latest issue of principle on which current head of Radio 3 Roger Wright has given way is the reduction of Radio 3's signal quality. Having persuaded us all to buy DAB radios with the promise of CD-quality sound, the Beeb has reduced Radio 3's bandwidth from 192 kilobites per second (the industry-accepted minimum for serious sound quality) to 160kps, reallocating the spare 32 to Five Live Sports Extra. As if sports coverage needs CD-quality sound.

The justifiably angry Friends of Radio 3 pressure group has been campaigning to get the kilobites back, complaining that once again the Radio 3 audience is being sidelined as marginal and insignificant. But they've had no proper response from the BBC – still less from Wright who persistently ignores the FoR3 and is, as usual, keeping his head down.

It was ironic to hear Wright the other day on radio saying how much he'd learned from his late predecessor Drummond. Drummond would have fumed and ranted, rung up the Queen Mother, and brow-beaten every suit in sight until he got those bites back.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

Down on the Farm

AN IRISH scientist, according to the *Sunday Times*, has discovered that his country's biggest single contribution to global warming is the methane given off by the burping and farting of its cows.

Agriculture accounts for 29 percent of Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions, more than half of which emerge from the front and back ends of the animals which give us Irish beef and Kerrygold butter. And methane, as every good little greenie knows, is 20 times more effective at trapping heat in the atmosphere than CO_2.

One country where this is very stale news is New Zealand, which like Ireland is mainly agricultural and which discovered some years back that its 30m sheep and 10m cows were giving off 37m tons of methane a year – more greenhouse gas than any other part of its economy. Since New Zealand, unlike its neighbours, had signed up to the Kyoto treaty, how was it to meet its commitment to curb those emissions?

Its Labour government came up with the brilliant idea of imposing a "flatulence tax" on every sheep, cow and deer in the country. Not even the islands' politicians (just as thick as our own) imagined that this would in itself persuade the animals to hold back their wind. But at least it could be pretended that the purpose of the tax was to raise £14m a year to subsidise research into ways of getting the animals to give off rather less of the noxious gas sometime in the future.

Unsurprisingly, the response was, first, a nationwide guffaw of incredulity, followed by a roar of protest from New Zealand's 130,000 farmers who immediately launched a campaign called FART (Fight Against Ridiculous Tax). Polls showed that only 12 percent of the population were "green" enough to think the "fart tax" was anything other than a bad joke. On behalf of the 84 percent opposed to the tax, farmers blocked the streets of Wellington, the capital, with 200 tractors. One MP even drove a tractor up the steps of the parliament building in protest, thus earning himself a bossy reprimand on health and safety grounds from the country's tight-lipped female prime minister, Helen Clark. A local newspaper gave out free baked beans to the demonstrators, so they could make up for all the cows and sheep which could not be present.

Until then New Zealand's farmers had been best known for the fact that, alone in the developed world, they receive no subsidies. Since these were abolished, agriculture has become the fastest growing sector of the country's economy. Its farmers are now so efficient they can transport their lamb and butter half way round the world to Britain and still compete on price with their lavishly-subsidised EU counterparts. But, as if terrified that this gave their country the reputation of being a bastion of the free market, New Zealand's politically correct Labour ministers seemed determined to make their country the laughing stock of the farming world. At least Ireland as yet hasn't announced any plans to do the same. But the really terrifying thought, is that, when Defra works out that Britain has even more sheep and cattle than either of these countries, our own Labour government may come up with the bright idea that Britain must save the planet by following New Zealand's example.

'Muckspreader'

Radisson

Welcomes

Emerging Infectious Diseases

Minnesota Hotel

Letters

Private Eye

Closer to God

Sir,

Further to recent letters about the placing of copies of The Eye. Disturbing respect for The Vicar is shown in the Birmingham bookshop which shelves the St Albion Parish News collection in the "spirituality" section.

Yours,
THEA GOODSELL,

Via email.

Wobbly reading

Sir,

Colin Buttwell suggests (Eye 1166) Karen James patronises her local newsagent to buy the Eye, rather than rifle through FHM, Loaded et al at her supermarket. If her local newsagent is anything like mine, she will discover shelves crammed with "specialist" magazines, a problem an Eye reader encountered some years ago and who, if I remember rightly, found his Eye next to "Breasts in Jelly"; a publication so specialist that sadly even my local newsagent fails to stock it.

Yours faithfully,
JONATHAN HULL,

Hemel Hempstead.

Lookalike

Tony

Stripper

Sir,

This photo of a stripper at a recent hen party in a pub in Brighton looks extraordinarily like the "holiday snap" of the vicar that Mr Campbell supposedly developed with his "photoshop" device.

Surely it cannot be the case that Labour Party funding is so critical that it now requires moonlighting?

Yours faithfully,
JOHN BAKER,

Hove, E. Sussex.

Pull up a chair

Sir,

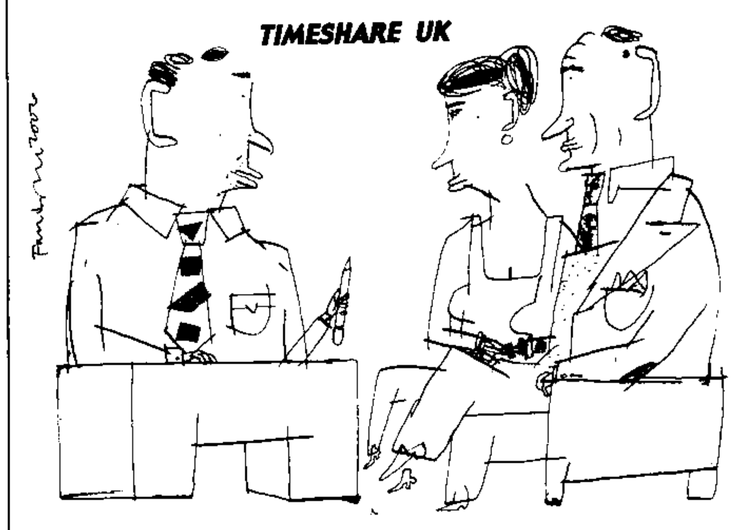
You are right to point out the problems the Appointments Commission is having recruiting chairs to the new Primary Care Trusts, as many soon to be ex-non executives are bemused, confused and basically fed up with DoH guidelines that are directives, SHA bullying and policies that have been, at best, contradictory.

But you are incorrect to believe Fred Hucker is the new chief executive of the soon-to-be-formed Oxfordshire Primary Care Trust. He is the chair-designate.

Best wishes,
DAVID JAMES,

Kidlington, Oxford.

Scenes You Seldom See



"There again, booking a holiday through a travel agent is usually a whole lot cheaper and you can go whenever you want"

Pews for thought

Sir,

Piloti's ranting about St Dunstan's Church in Cranbrook (Eye 1166) rather undermines his argument. If he had been around 150 years ago, he would of course have forbidden all the Victorian alterations! Perhaps he has not actually been to Cranbrook; the clutter plainly detracts from the beauty of the building.

The churches of England are full to the brim of (mainly second-rate) pews; no-one wants to get rid of them all or even most of them, but it is good to have comfortable chairs in some churches as in all the cathedrals.

When the chairs in cathedrals are periodically removed from the nave for special events, everyone who comes in is stunned by the way the building comes alive. Ptolemy Dean is absolutely right about space and we should let him and his clients do their stuff. I predict that the few locals who are up in arms will change their minds.

Keep up the good work!

JONATHAN GLEDHILL,

Lichfield, Staffs.

Sir,

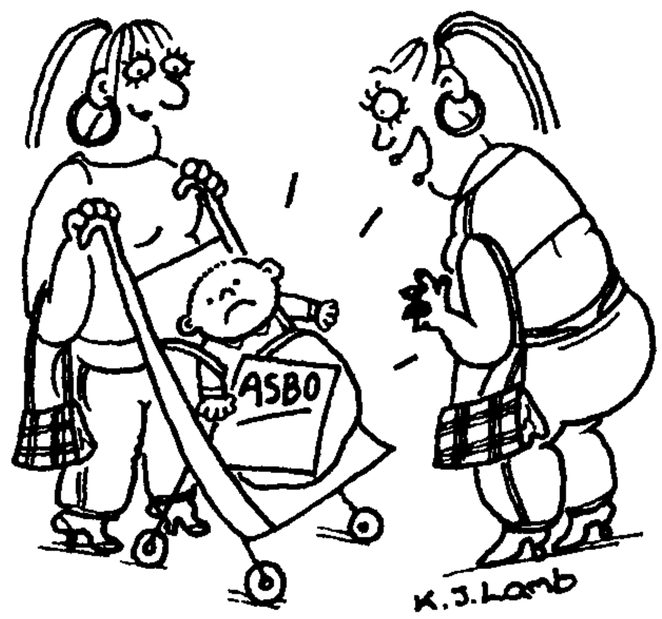
Re. Nooks & Corners, 1166.

I start to wonder what Piloti actually wants from England's churches.

Yes, he's right to harp on about dreadful trendy intrusions – many of which are encouraged by ill-conceived health and safety and accessibility laws. But as for getting rid of Victorian pews: has he ever tried to sit on one for more than a minute? The Victorians were interested in "mortification of the flesh". Most of us today are not. And on an aesthetic level, many of our cathedrals have no pews, and their naves are glorious, flexible spaces as a result. Who would support the idea of filling these with rigid inflexible rows of hard wood? We may have to thank the Victorians for preventing hundreds of churches from falling down, but we don't have to consider everything that they did as wonderful. Betjeman certainly didn't.

Regards,
COLIN BOOTH,

Wells, Somerset.



"He's got his father's Asbo!"

Off target

Sir,

Re: Satanic Panic (Eye 1166).

As the Today Programme reporter featured in your article "Satanic Panic" (Eye 1166), I'd like to thank you for the name check – much appreciated. However, your attempt to shoot my reporting down in flames has failed. I am not a proponent of a belief in satanic ritual abuse.

Perhaps it's a case of double vision.

You say allegations of abuse in Rochdale and Orkney were a myth. Good point, well made (although I thought we knew that already). But what has that got to do with the murder of Victoria Climbie, and the horrendous abuse of other children believed to be possessed? There is plenty of evidence: parents and carers are serving lengthy jail sentences.

Surely comparing overzealous social workers' belief in satanic ritual abuse with the African community's belief in witchcraft is enough to send anyone boss-eyed.

The Today Programme and Newsnight have broadcast a number of reports on child abuse linked to the widespread belief in witchcraft and possession. This included an accurate summary of a leaked Metropolitan Police report. There has never been a suggestion from any quarter that we misrepresented the content in any way. Our reports were NOT false or racist – and I challenge you to prove otherwise. These were strong news stories and we were right to air them.

Yours faithfully,
ANGUS STICKLER,

Reporter, The Today Programme, BBC News.

On target

Sir,

The piece on Child Abuse – Satanic Panic, is a very interesting and valuable contribution to debate surrounding the problem of "so-called child witches".

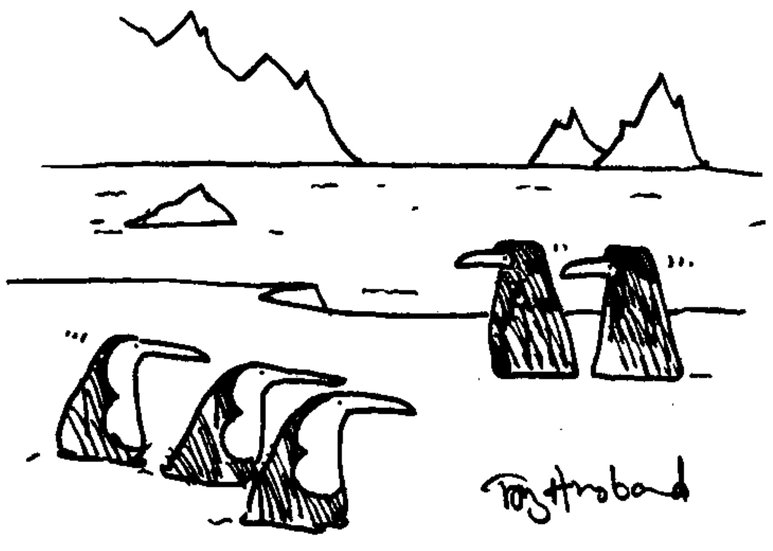
It is the first article which I know of in the UK, that separates the very real imported problem of "so-called child witches" or "enfants dits sorcières" as they are known in DR Congo (where the problem is most prevalent in Africa), from unsubstantiated claims of satanic abuse and "traditional" or Juju/voodoo rituals.

As your reporter correctly points out these three distinct issues were conflated by Angus Stickler's reports for the BBC and by the Evening Standard last year. This of course risks "demonising" all Africans as "that's what they do isn't it" and detracts from the real problem of physical abuse of children, which is aided and abetted by (mostly) self-ordained preachers in the new evangelical African churches that have come to the UK with their refugee parishioners from countries like DR Congo and Angola.

My colleague Jonny Donovan and I have worked at first hand in DR Congo and Angola with organisations which are trying to combat the problem in those countries – Kinshasa for instance has upwards of 30,000 street children aged from three to 12, most of whom have been ejected from their families accused of witchcraft.

SIMON LAWSON,

Nomad Productions Ltd.



Floral tribute

Sir,

Re the cartoon in Eye 1165 ("Accident flowers").

One's natural reaction, seeing flowers by the roadside, is to dismiss it as naff. But think about it for a minute. Each offering records pain and loss – to the living, of someone dear; to the dead, of everything. A colleague full of life, delight, appetite, was killed on her bike in Euston Road at 6pm on Friday 21 July. (It's part of a designated cycle route – a trap that needs to be seen to.) Flowers on the railings (yes) opposite the British Library celebrated her, and lamented her death.

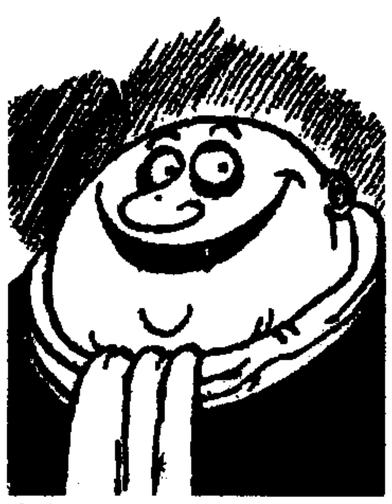
And the cartoon wasn't very funny, was it?

Yours,
EMILY LANE,

Thames & Hudson Ltd.

Lookalike

Feendish



O'Briain

Sir,

Has anyone else noticed the uncanny resemblance between the top contemporary comedy performer Dara O'Briain and the popular 1960's cartoon character Grimley Feendish, aka the rottenest crook in the world?

I think we should be told.

Best wishes,
STEVE COWIE,

Llandudno.

Tommy Rot

Sir,

I am not a member of the Scottish Socialist Party nor am I a particular fan of Tommy Sheridan's, yet I feel moved to respond to the article regarding the gentleman's party donations (Eye 1166).

As promised when he stood for election to the Scottish Parliament, Tommy Sheridan only accepts a portion – calculated as the average salary that a skilled worker in Scotland could expect to receive – of his MSP salary. The rest is always donated to his party. This is a promise made by all Scottish Socialist Party candidates. The £7,800 quoted in your article, a figure that was also donated in the same period by fellow Scottish Socialist Party MSP Rosie Byrne, is merely his latest salary portion. As such he can well afford to lose a sum of money that he has never had. I believe that it is his, and Ms Byrne's, intention to continue this arrangement with their new party. Whether or not the News of the World's appeal is successful is, as far as Mr Sheridan's party donations go, irrelevant.

Otherwise an entertaining issue.

AMANDA FRASER,

Via email.

Notes and Queries

Sir,

*Young Master **Thribb** has spoiled an otherwise excellent poem with his self-evident youth and lack of musical knowledge. The violinist in question is **Anne-Sophie** Mutter, not Sophie-Ann.*

TIM HALL.

*... The spoof **Daily Telegraph** piece on forfeited Test Matches (Eye 1166, p19) refers to the Warwickshire professional P.V.R.M Steggles. This should surely read Steggles P.V.R.M. As I'm sure you varsity types must know, amateurs' initials came before their names, and professionals' after.*

This accounts for the infamous incident at Lord's in the 1950s when Fred Titmus came out to bat to the sound of the tannoy announcing a scorecard error: "Delete F.J. Titmus; insert Titmus F.J."

SEAN KING.

*... Sorry to disappoint you but the "Historically correct" **Camp Chicory & Coffee Essence** label in Eye 1166 was also a victim of political correctness. Originally, the Sikh stood holding a tray with a coffee pot on it. However, this was airbrushed out several years ago.*

BILL BAKER.

*... More carping trivia, but the gong in the **Rank Organisation** trail (Eye 1165, Poetry Corner – Ken Richmond) was actually hit by the percussionist James Blades who gave a wonderful demonstration when he visited my school 45 years ago.*

RAJ KOTHARI.

*... Can I be the pedant who points out that Holst's suite **The Planets** would not be performed "minus Pluto" (Eye 1166) as it had not been discovered when the work was composed between 1914 and 1916? Pluto was discovered four years before Holst's death in 1934. However, in 2000 the British composer Colin Matthews added a new movement called Pluto the Renewer which was performed at the 2001 Proms and can be heard in a newly released recording by Sir Simon Rattle and the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra.*

IAN MacMILLAN.

*... The caption to your extremely lifelike photograph of **Henry Blofeld** (Eye 1166) stated that he was "the former head of Smersh". As every Bond student knows, Henry Blofeld was the head of Spectre (the Special Executive for Counter-espionage Terrorism Revenge and Extortion).*

DUDLEY TURNER.

*... Re **St Ives**. Nigel Ayers (Letters, 1166) makes the common mistake of assuming that people can only meet while travelling in opposite directions.*

If the story is to be believed, each of the wives would be carrying seven sacks containing seven cats, each with seven kittens which all adds up to a fairly substantial load. As no mention of any vehicle is made, it is realistic to assume travel by foot – therefore it would be very easy to "meet" with the party while travelling in the same direction, ie to St. Ives.

That makes nine in my book!

PATRICK SMITH.

Chelsea Blues

Sir,

*Regarding Keith Lee's comments about my Premiersh*ts strip (1164). A closer look at the strip would have shown that the subs bench had 13 players on it plus a trainer and a manager. Thirteen plus eleven (on the pitch) equals a squad of twenty four (ok, the current squad is 22, maybe I deserve a yellow card), so I never actually stated that Chelsea have got a massive squad in terms of numbers, but they're unique in having a bottomless pit of cash to have a squad of two quality teams, not one team with subs.*

As for "Why pick on Chelsea?" Since Roman took over three years ago Chelsea have spent £375m, a THIRD of the total spent by all Premiership clubs during that time – surely that's something worth commenting on?

I suppose what really hurt me about Keith's letter was not that I know nothing about football, I play three/four times a week so I know the difference between my nutmegs and stepovers. No, what really hurt was how he tried to spread a malicious rumour that I went to a public school!

It's only a game, etc,

PAUL WOOD,

Via email.

SOLUTIONS

"She Magazine's Food Solutions" – *recipes*

"Burnt Tree Vehicle Solutions" – *van hire*

"The Parkforce Solution: the ethical, lawful and non-confrontational alternative to wheel clamping" – *parking tickets*

"A Total Wall Solution: Paroc has launched a new facade solution" – *cladding*

"To reflect the change in the way we would like to see the service provided is portrayed we have decided to rename the Homeless Section Housing Solutions" – *internal memo from Mansfield District Council*

All submitted by readers

Road rage special

Sir,

Law lecturer Richard Austen-Baker's rant against public transport (Letters, Eye 1166) contains so many nonsensical assertions it's hard to know where to start. However, most glaring is the "economic commonsense" [sic] argument for removing bus lanes: that the losers on the buses must be contributing less to the economy than the average Mr Toad.

It's true that rush-hour buses carry workers plus many "unemployed" passengers, like students. These students, however, have an important future value to the economy – otherwise, presumably, society would not be wasting money on trainers, or indeed lecturers. More importantly we maximise economic benefits only by effectively managing the "scarce resources", ie road space at peak times – so it's precisely because few individual Toads occupying their chunk of road can match the contribution of 40-50 people on a bus that it makes economic sense to deprioritise motorists twice daily. Providing faster, reliable public transport also goes some way to preventing economically catastrophic gridlock which our laissez-faire transport policies are increasingly delivering to every city daily...

DENIS MURPHY.

... Bus lanes are usually restricted to buses (and taxis in some cities); therefore, his argument that "queues of traffic build up behind them" shows that he does not understand the fundamental argument for bus lanes – they are for BUSES – not car users...

PAMELA MARIN, Ph.D.

... Mr Austen-Baker asserts that people "use public transport because they can't afford private transport". I can only assume he has not travelled by rail in recent years, or he would be aware of the obscenely high ticket prices charged by most if not all train operators. I also assume he has never met anyone with a disability, or he would be aware that a great many people are forced to travel by public transport (however badly run or expensive) because they cannot drive for medical reasons.

SOPHIE WATSON.

... In his letter re bus lanes, Richard Austen-Baker (Eye 1166) asserts that per "simple common sense economics...people generally use state schools because they can't afford private... get NHS treatment because they can't afford private medicine (and) use public transport because they can't afford private transport." Using such "common sense" logic, I suggest he also believes that people generally have only one surname as they can't afford the two that he no-doubt enjoys...

DAVID EARDLEY.

... I feel I owe a debt of gratitude to Richard Austen-Baker for enlightening me.

As a nurse, I had always supposed that I was of at least as much value to society as (say) a boy racer or a drug dealer. However, since they drive cars and I don't, it can't be so.

Furthermore, I never realised how annoying it must be for car drivers who have to stop behind buses which annoyingly insist on stopping to pick up, or set down, passengers. After all, every single one of those drivers is on an absolutely vital journey where a delay of a few seconds could be crucial.

By the same token, any pedestrian who expects cars to observe such nonsense as zebra crossings or red lights gets no more sympathy from me. After all, most of those cars probably contain captains of industry or, even more impressively, law lecturers.

DAVE WHIPPMAN.

*... Why don't we take his argument to its logical conclusion? He says: "It makes no sense to give them (pensioners, etc) priority over people in cars." As our time, in his opinion, is less valuable to the economy, presumably than he considers his own is, maybe he should insist that we poorer members of society should also wait out turn in shops, hospitals, etc, until more important people like himself have been attended to first. In fact, why don't we take this argument even further; and make us all wear a large yellow patch to identify us, so that we are treated according to our lower-class citizenship. Surely, **he** can lobby for a new law to this effect!*

MAURICE R. WESTERN.

Lookalike

Ray of sunshine

Scotsman with a grievance

Sir,

Does this picture from last week finally disprove P.G. Wodehouse's famous assertion (in 'Blandings Castle') that "it is never difficult to distinguish between a Scotsman with a grievance and a ray of sunshine"?

Yours,
ENA B. BLAIR,

London SW1.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"He [van Persie] is the right player for them – he can open a can of worms."
PAUL MERSON, ITV
(Andre Petheram)

"He's got two good feet, left and right..."
RONNIE GOODLASS, BBC Radio Merseyside
(Joe Hurst)

"We're not as good as we think we are. We need to go out there and prove that."
STEVE McCLAREN, BBC1
(Julian Thake)

"It was a no-win situation for everyone. We knew we had to win, and we did."
STEVE McCLAREN, Radio 5 Live
(Paddy Griffith)

"Even though there are only 400 Andorran supporters here [at Old Trafford], I think that will constitute a record home crowd for them even though they are away from home."
ALAN GREEN, Radio 5 Live
(Andrew Curphey)

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

KATE MOSS STILL WANTS TO MARRY PETE!!!
REHAB!
GOSH KATE, AFTER EVERYTHING THAT'S HAPPENED, YOU STILL WANT TO MARRY ME.....
YES..... EVEN AFTER ALL THE....
.....EXTRA PUBLICITY, LOADS MORE WORK, AND HUGE AMOUNTS OF MONEY I'VE EARNED OUT OF OUR RELATIONSHIP!

Letter from **Jerusalem**

from Our Own Correspondent

"WE SHALL create a race that is strong, brave and cruel," prime minister Ehud Olmert's old right-wing party colleagues used to sing at the start of their meetings. Our recent demolition job of poor old Lebanon proved this dream has now come true, but what Israelis are not any more is smart.

How else could we have failed to foresee that our brutal treatment of the Palestinians would win them ever-new champions? True, the western media have tired of showing pictures of new West Bank settlements on the sites of razed Palestinian homes. Nor do they focus much on the horrors of Gaza, from which we ostensibly withdrew last year but in which our armed incursions have left more than 200 dead, including 62 children and 25 women. Most other Gazans remain without clean water, electricity or food, besieged but daily watched on Arab satellite TV.

Nor should Hizbollah's decision to open hostilities on 12 July by seizing two of our soldiers have come as a surprise. But when we started to hit back, we got another shock: Hizbollah turned out to have prepared well for this kind of war, while our high command had prepared for quite a different one. Used to fighting Palestinian boys throwing stones and men with hand guns, and despite all our tanks and planes, our once mighty military lacked the on-ground intelligence to dislodge Hizbollah.

With a ceasefire in place, Olmert has grudgingly agreed to hold a public inquiry into a war that left 116 of our soldiers dead, as well as 39 of our civilians. However, it will deal only with technical aspects – "Why did our military command initially believe that the war could be won by the Air Force alone?" – rather than the real issue of whether a different set of policies could have prevented the war and delivered the security all Israelis want.

Instead, a government of mediocrities stitched together for political convenience is coming apart at the seams. So little does Olmert trust his foreign minister and former Mossad agent Tzipi Livni, the two barely spoke during the crisis. Our defence minister, Amir Peretz, is a former small town mayor with a huge moustache, a political street fighter well out of his depth who got the job only because Olmert needed the support of his Labour party in the Knesset.

"Every new Arab generation hates Israel more than the previous one," remarked Syria's western-educated president, Bashar al Assad, as he contemplated Lebanon's ruins.

Rather than worry about this, we keep looking for alternative solutions. Our Deputy Prime Minister, Shimon Peres, argues that Israel merely needs to develop better technological deterrents "based on miniaturised arms or on remote-controlled robots operating on the battlefield; perhaps even on a type of intelligence hitherto unknown, grounded in revolutionary nanotechnology".

This view has been echoed by the head of our secret service, Yuval Diskin, whose organisation is now recruiting software developers "with capabilities that can transform the fiction we see in movies into every-day reality".

One outcome of this technological race is the mini-cluster bombs programmed for delayed explosion that Israel rained down on Lebanon in the last days of the summer war. Picked up by returning village kids scrambling through the ruins of their homes, they keep causing crippling injuries and deaths.

However, let it not be said that Israelis are not capable of soft, gentle feelings. Only a few days ago an Israeli animal charity contacted the Lebanese authorities. Aware that many Lebanese pets had been left behind, wounded or with inadequate supplies, it was offering to come over, provide care and adopt the poor things. The charity's officers were bewildered when the Lebanese authorities rejected such kindness out of hand.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

"The Lactation Station Breast Milk Bar is open nightly between 5pm and 8pm," performance artist Jess Dobkin told reporters in the Ontario College of Art and Design, "and offers individual servings of breast milk, donated by six lactating mothers. I accept that it's a challenging concept, and I don't expect everyone to feel comfortable at the milk bar. If people want to taste the milk, great. And if they don't, that's great too, but why not? I want to explore that discomfort."

Toronto-based Dobkin was defending her latest performance artwork, which follows in the tradition of her previous exhibits. "In 2003, I staged 'Magic Trick,' which featured me chewing gum, then blowing a pink bubble from my butt. That was followed by 'Two Boobs,' in which my painted breasts negotiated the complexities of their relationship, and 'Eat Out,' a four-course gourmet dinner theatre piece, with a live cunt-eating contest for dessert. I realise that the milk bar will be controversial, but I'm a serious artist, and I don't want the content of the work to be lost in all the PR noise."

Official responses have so far been mixed. Some Canadian politicians have denounced it as a waste of public money, comparing it to another recent government-funded arts project, which involved Mexican artist Israel Mora displaying his own ejaculate. But health officials refused to condemn it, although Health Canada did warn consumers that "there are health risks associated with drinking breast milk from strangers." *(Canadian Press, 16/6/06. Spotter: Wallace Brown)*

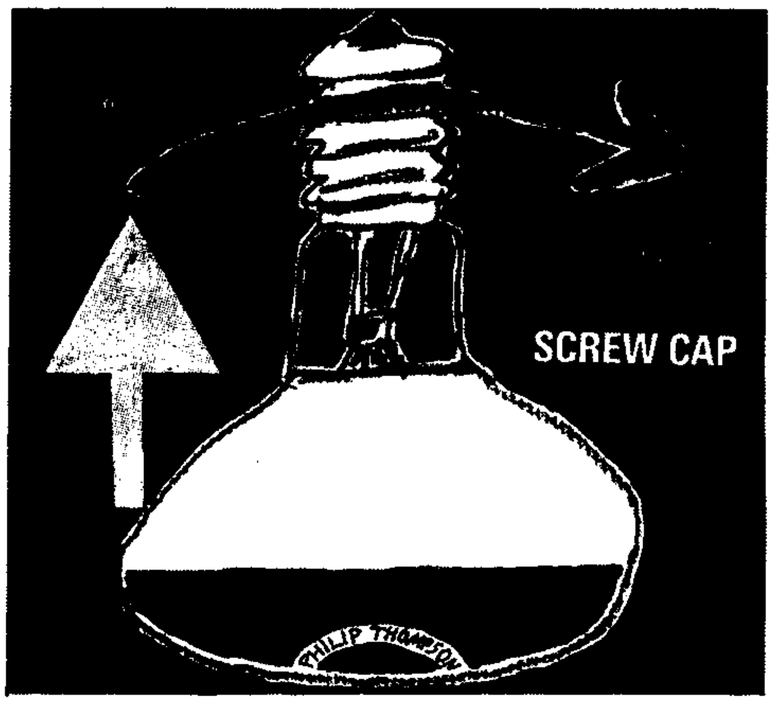
– o –

"When I discovered that insurance for a hearse cost less than one-third as much as regular car insurance, I decided to re-register my vehicle," an anonymous woman caller told the New Zealand radio station Newstalk ZB. "By describing my car as a 'non-commercial hearse' that would be used to 'carry dead animals,' I reduced my insurance from NZ$183 to NZ$58, and now several of my friends have done the same. And because I regularly carry frozen chickens home from the supermarket, it's all perfectly legal."

But Andy Knackstedt of Land Transport New Zealand warned that the authorities were taking urgent measures to stamp out one of the country's fastest-growing scams. "Carrying groceries or dead animals in your car does not make it a hearse," he warned, "but many people seem to think it does. On the day the radio talk show aired, 40 people re-registered their vehicles under the 'hearse' category, but by doing so, they are voiding their ACC insurance cover, which is illegal. LTNZ has now written to more than 900 people, giving them a week to re-register correctly, or face prosecution. Let me be clear: the definition of a hearse is a vehicle used to convey coffins, not groceries." (New Zealand Herald, 9/8/06. Spotter: Anon)

– o –

"When I woke up, I felt a pain in my lower abdomen, but I had no idea what it was," prison inmate Fateh Mohamed told reporters from his bed in Nishtar Hospital in Multan (Pakistan). "When the doctors told me I had a light bulb in my anus, I could not believe it, and I still have no idea who put it there. It must have been the

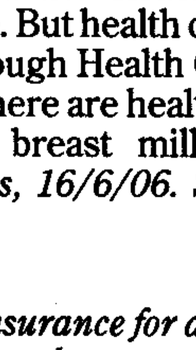


police, or another prisoner. But now it has been removed, I thank Allah that I feel comfort again, after days of agony when I could eat and drink nothing but water."

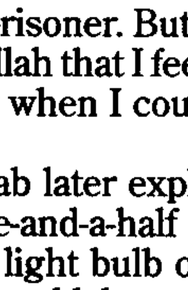
Dr Farrukh Aftab later explained that "The operation took one-and-a-half hours, because we had to take the light bulb out intact. Had it broken inside, it would have become a very complicated situation indeed. Neither I nor my colleagues have ever encountered anything like this before, and frankly we doubt the felon's story that somebody drugged him, and inserted the bulb when he was comatose. We think he knows very well who inserted it, but it is not our job to pass judgement on other people's solitary vices. We just try to repair the damage." *(Arab News, 26/6/06. Spotter: John Welz)*

Apparently BY MIKE BARFIELD

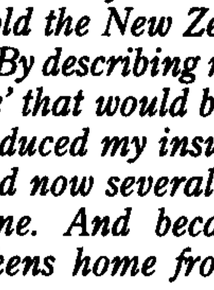
POLITICAL CHAMELEONS: A GUIDE



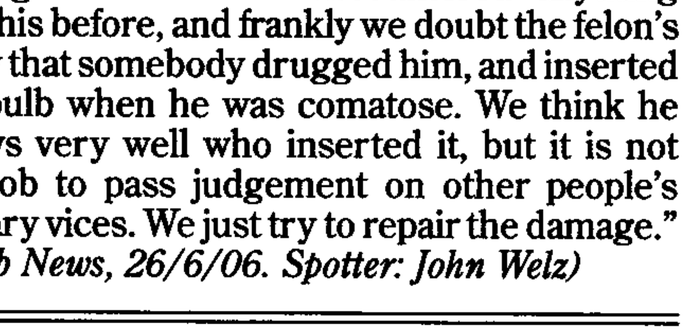
BLUE, TURNING GREEN



YELLOW, TURNING INVISIBLE



RED, TURNING BLUER & BLUER



BROWN, TURNING PURPLE

deepcut shots in the dark

A Private Eye special report by Heather Mills and Brian Cathcart

WHEN NICHOLAS BLAKE QC published his report last March into three of the four deaths of young recruits at the Deepcut army barracks in Surrey, he concluded that all were probably suicides, that the trainees themselves were solely to blame, that they hadn't been "bullied to death" and that a public inquiry would serve no purpose.

Delighted ministers declared the Deepcut affair over: there had been no murders; there was no need for a public inquiry; and problems at the barracks had largely been dealt with so there was nothing more to be said. Just as they had hoped, discussion in the media petered out in days and a scandal that had caused public concern for four years seemed to be fading into history.

On closer inspection, however, the 400-page Blake report (with hundreds more pages of appendices) raises many more questions than it answers. Far from being "the last word" on the matter, the muddled and incomplete report merely demonstrates once more the need for a full public inquiry – something the bereaved families have been demanding for years.

Despite early reservations about the limited and behind-closed-doors character of Blake's review, the families were persuaded to put their trust in the QC, a respected human rights barrister. But now they feel betrayed and let down on the grounds that:

- Blake was a credulous investigator – cherry picking statements that supported his theories and neglecting those that did not. He interviewed the higher ranking army personnel but ignored those who were at the scenes, and rarely questioned the word of army or police officers who insisted nothing was wrong.
- He made evidence public for the first time that often contradicts accounts of the deaths, yet still declares that "on the balance of probabilities" there was no mystery.
- Though large amounts of evidence point to a culture of bullying and sexual and psychological abuse at Deepcut, Blake fails to call those responsible to account – and in many cases makes excuses for them.
- Though he had abundant evidence that Sean Benton suffered sustained bullying at the barracks, he rejected this as a factor in his death.
- Though the initial police investigations into at least three of the four deaths were grossly incompetent, with evidence neglected, lost or destroyed, Blake never criticises the police.
- Though the evidence points to disastrous failures of management at Deepcut and a *deliberate* army refusal to address key problems, Blake failed to call a single senior officer to account.
- Blake failed to challenge – or even recognise – a long history of cover-up and obfuscation by the army, the police and the MoD.
- When his report was published he stood by as the MoD choreographed events and spun his findings to ensure that the official line – that the Deepcut affair was over – had maximum prominence. The families had barely an hour to digest the review, take on board its new revelations and ask questions.

Blake certainly failed to get to the source of the stink emanating from Deepcut. And there is a stink. The four deaths at the barracks, whether they were suicides or worse (and that still cannot be ruled out), were extreme symptoms of a dangerous malaise in the British army's training system; a malaise which affected the youngest and rawest recruits in the armed forces, which went on for years, was the result of official army policy and which was prolonged by a negligent failure to address glaring problems.

The details, treated almost blandly by Blake, make shocking reading...

the police investigation

Knackered from the start

IT WAS TO TAKE seven years and four violent deaths before clues started emerging that something was terribly wrong at Deepcut, the sprawling training barracks near Camberley, Surrey. First, two sets of grieving parents, heard they had both lost sons – Geoff Gray and James Collinson, both 17 – within six months; then a television researcher with BBC Scotland made the discovery that two more families – those of Sean Benton, 20, and Cheryl James, 18, had suffered in just the same way a few years earlier.

With four dead – all young, all on guard duty, all killed by gunshots and all rubber-stamped as suicides, Deepcut became national news. Concern mounted as former recruits claimed the barracks was run by sadistic non-commissioned officers (NCOs), and that bullying and sexual harassment were rampant. Frank Swann, an independent ballistics expert, who spent six weeks at the base, started to question whether the recruits could have shot themselves in the manner described.

The ensuing public outcry and questions in Parliament forced Surrey police to upgrade their investigation into the last death and re-open the others. They soon realised they had badly messed up.

In the first three cases they failed to "assert primacy" over the military police, while the military police certainly weren't asserting any primacy of their own. In short, no one ran these inquiries; they were presumed suicides and left at that.

The result was lost evidence. The usual forensic essentials of a violent death investigation – securing the scene, a minute search, fingerprinting, swabbing, tracing, expert examination of the body and weapon – were ignored. Records and uniforms were destroyed, witnesses were not interviewed, hypotheses were not tested. To this day no one can say for sure who pulled the trigger on the weapons found at the scenes and, indeed, whether those weapons were the ones used.

Once Surrey police spotted the scale of their errors, they made a guarded apology. They were sorry, they said, "for not properly challenging early assumptions that these

young soldiers had taken their own lives and for our failure to overturn the custom and practice of the day, which allowed for the investigation to be delegated to the army".

It looked like a sly attempt to blame the army, and as for the custom and practice, well, no record of it exists. But having made a mess once, and with the heat of public scrutiny upon them, Surrey police threw themselves into a re-investigation covering all four cases. In September 2003 the force produced four separate reports into the deaths – of Sean Benton and Cheryl James in 1995, of Geoff Gray in 2001 and of James Collinson in 2002. Incredibly, these were not published and were not released to the bereaved families.

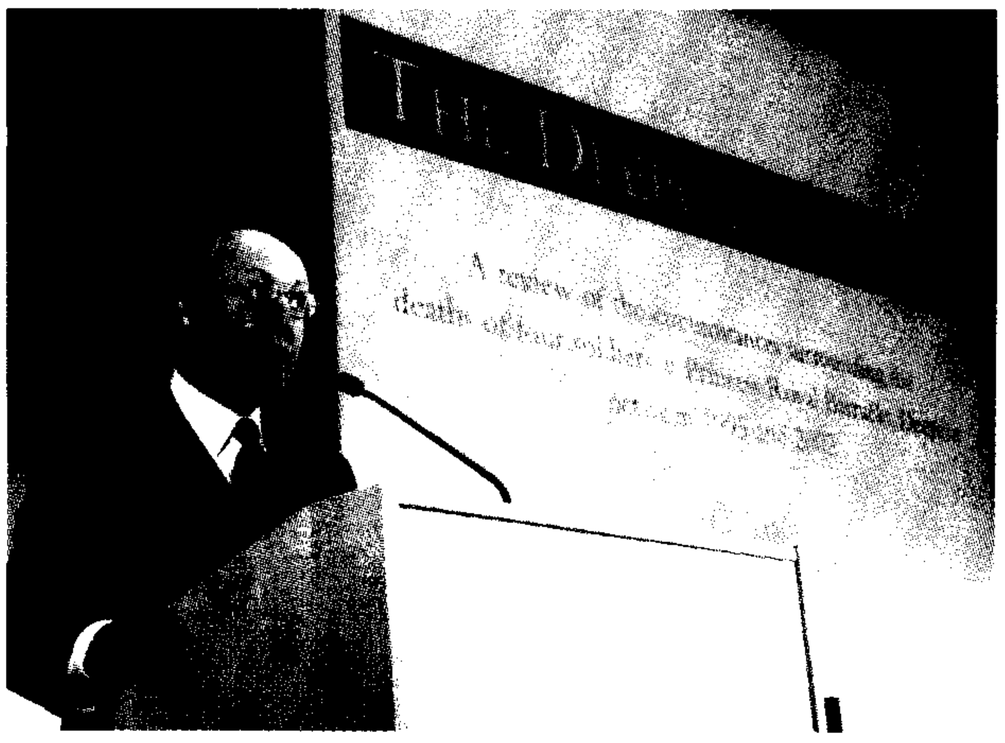
The only known fact of substance is one line from a statement by Bob Quick, then Surrey's Deputy Chief Constable: "No evidence has come to light so far to indicate any prospect of a prosecution directly related to these deaths."

Degrading acts

Not surprisingly, the families were not satisfied. Such were their complaints that Surrey called in Devon & Cornwall Constabulary to review their work. The following March, Surrey police completed a fifth and final report which was to lay bare many of the army's policy failures . Of course, as with everything else in the Deepcut affair, much of the detail remains suppressed, but that report did prompt a Commons Defence Select Committee inquiry into the army's general duty of care towards young recruits. That was highly critical and brought into the public domain shocking allegations about the base.

Surrey had received allegations from 118 recruits and former recruits of sexual assault, including rape, bullying, harassment and recruits being made to carry out degrading acts such as being forced to strip and parade naked. When in October 2004, Leslie Skinner, an army instructor, was convicted for sexual assaults on male recruits at Deepcut and elsewhere, the demands for a public inquiry were becoming irresistible.

The government's response was to bring in Nicholas Blake, a respected human rights QC, as a half-way measure to "review" the evidence. At first, some of the families were reluctant to co-operate, but eventually they agreed – at least someone independent of the state would get to look at the evidence.



Blake's progress? Not much, actually

Blake was nearly a year into his review when Devon & Cornwall finally completed its investigation into Surrey police's handling of the Deepcut deaths. That is mired in secrecy too, but a summary published in November 2005 made alarming reading. The review team thought that some of what they saw was muddled and wrong-headed. The top brass in Surrey, it seems, interfered so much that it wasn't clear who was really in charge. Worse, there was no auditable decision-making process. When a written set of "initial strategic aims" was found, Surrey officers denied all knowledge of them – perhaps not surprisingly, because the original read: "Slowly turn the media focus away from murder, turn spotlight of criticism on to the army and move from how they died to why". Geoff Gray's family had also obtained under the Freedom of Information Act an army email which said of the Surrey police re-investigation "police admitted that the investigation will have the same result – suicide."

This prompted a complaint to the Independent Police Complaints Commission that this was hardly an "open minded" re-investigation. The IPCC rejected the complaint.

Screwed up

Blake met with Devon & Cornwall police in November 2005 – two months before he concluded his own review. This gave him little time to re-appraise the evidence gleaned by Surrey – evidence that he relied upon to reach his conclusions. In fact he ignored Devon & Cornwall's criticisms and declared Surrey's investigations from 2002 onward as "thorough and exhaustive".

But as all the reports remain a secret shared between Surrey and Blake, we are asked to take it on trust that the same force that screwed up the investigations once will have got them completely right the second time.

the shootings

1. Sean Benton

SEAN BENTON, 20, died from five gunshot wounds to the chest – two on one side and three on the other – in the early hours of 9 June 1995. The recruit from Hastings, East Sussex, was about to be discharged from the army. With just five days left on a three-month warning for kicking in a window, Sean had threatened a woman NCO after she told him he would be on guard duty over the coming weekend.

On 8 June Major Robert Gascoigne fined him £150 for the offence and said he would be applying for his discharge. Because Sean had a history of self-harm, Major Gascoigne said that a decision was taken that, in the meantime, his duties should not involve carrying a weapon. He was apparently supervised during the evening, but left alone in the bar at about 11.20 that night.

Sean eventually tricked a young guard into handing over her SA80 automatic rifle by saying she was wanted in the guardroom. He then headed off on a lone patrol in the direction of the officers' mess. Soon another guard reported hearing a shot and the news was radioed to the guardroom.

The duty corporal grabbed a weapon and ammunition and with a woman private drove towards the scene. Both initially described how they saw Sean sitting with his back to the perimeter fence. The corporal shouted to him to put the weapon down but they heard a burst of gunfire and saw Sean's body lurch over. The private kicked the weapon away from Sean's body and the pair tried to staunch the bleeding, but by the time an ambulance arrived Sean Benton was dead.

Three notes were found near the body, one to his parents, one to a sergeant and a third to a friend. When police arrived it appeared to be a clear case of suicide and an inquest decided that Sean had shot himself.

However, family members were not so sure, and after learning of Cheryl James's death at Deepcut in November that year, they and their MP began to ask questions. How, if only one shot was fired at close range, could Sean have fired the other four? And if army rules had been followed, could his death have been prevented?

More than ten years later, the Blake report sheds important new light on these events. When the woman private who said she witnessed Sean's death spoke to Surrey police in 2003, her story was significantly different from what the inquest heard in 1995.

First, both she and the corporal revealed that when they heard that Sean had a rifle, their first thought was that he might use it to threaten a particular lieutenant they knew he hated (and whom many other recruits hated too). More important, as she and the corporal ran towards Sean, she now said that Sean fired a shot in her direction. She then shouted at the corporal to return fire – to shoot at Sean – and was angry when, she says, he did not.

This cast Sean's death in a new light. If the private was right, her companion had the means – a readied rifle – and a legitimate reason to shoot. This in turn lent significance to another strange fact: the duty corporal's weapon was found to be short of one round (he denied firing it, saying he must have missed one cartridge when loading – though a witness who saw the loading remembered differently).

Because police never carried out a proper forensic examination of the scene, the body or the two weapons, the corporal's account of events can now never be scientifically confirmed. Incredibly, Sean's bloodstained jacket was swiftly laundered.

Blake, however, relied on reports prepared much later for Surrey police by the German

Federal Crime Bureau, the BKA, based on photographs, post-mortem reports and the remaining traces on Sean's jacket. They concluded that the two wounds on his right side were inflicted first, followed by the three on the left. Deposits found around all five bullet holes, moreover, indicated that none was fired from more than 10cm away.

But Frank Swann, an independent ballistics expert who was the first to look at the case, said that given the rapid speed at which the SA80 fires when set to automatic – 10 to 13 rounds per second – Sean's wounds would have been closer together if he had fired them all himself. Swann believed that only one wound appeared to have been made at close range and the others were fired from at least 14ft. (Swann maintains that Surrey police called off a meeting between ballistics experts, including him, after he insisted on making his own video of the proceedings – so he had a copy as well as the police. Consequently he says he will now *only* make his findings available to a public inquiry. But this means his evidence remains secret and untested).

According to the BKA, Sean must have shot himself first from a standing position and then from a kneeling one – yet the eyewitnesses described him sitting with his back to the fence. (Only later did one of them "accept" that "it could be more likely" that he was kneeling).

Blake accepts this and also concludes that the woman private was simply mistaken when she said Sean had fired in her direction. The "whoosh" she heard must have been a missed round heading into the open, he decided.

For Sean Benton's family and their legal advisers there are major difficulties here, of which the biggest is that the BKA ballistics reports remain, like so many other Deepcut documents, secret. But in the face of all this complicated and contradictory new evidence, Blake concludes that a new inquest, or indeed a public inquiry, wouldn't change the original suicide verdict.

Even if Blake is right and Sean did commit suicide, Blake himself reveals a catalogue of claims from recruits indicating that Sean was the victim of bullying by both sadistic NCOs and fellow recruits. One admitted being part of a group who, wearing gas masks, attacked Sean in his bed at night. And more than one suggested that Sean was often singled out by both the same corporal who saw Sean shoot himself, and by the sergeant who was in charge that night – a man Blake calls Sergeant B, but who has been identified in the media as Sgt Andrew Gavaghan.

Many witnesses described Gavaghan as a Jekyll and Hyde personality, charming to those he favoured and vile to those he did not. He himself spoke of a fictional "twin brother" into whom he turned when angry – he called this a "management tool". One recruit said: "I have seen Sgt Gavaghan for an unknown reason punch Sean in the chest and would pick Benton out of the parade and humiliate him in front of us. I can recall one incident when Sgt Gavaghan got Benton out and made him lay down and he was punched in the leg, given a dead leg."

Several recruits described how they saw Gavaghan or the corporal punch and or kick Sean. "The corporal was just an out and out bully and an extension of Sgt Gavaghan, in fact his right arm for punishments."

Blake had evidence from Sean's parents that when he was last home on leave, the previous May, he was unhappy and did not want to go back – although he made no complaint of bullying. Blake also had evidence to show that Sean lost well over three stone in weight in the six months before his death – at post-mortem he was 8st 7lbs.

But what does Blake conclude, in the face of all this evidence? At one point he says there is substantial evidence suggesting Sean was bullied. Later, he declares that it is difficult to reach any conclusion on whether Sean was the victim of bullying. Next he points out that Sean himself did not complain about bullying and says it would be a disservice to Sean's memory "merely to characterise him as a victim of bullying".

Finally Blake decides that Sean Benton died as a result of "his own deliberate act" and that "bullying by NCOs or otherwise played no part".

There is no doubt Sean Benton was utterly miserable when he died. Why was he so miserable and how did he die? Blake does not provide adequate answers. What he does do, is prove that only a public inquiry can.

the shootings

2. Cheryl James

CHERYL JAMES was just 18 and a soldier for less than six months when she was found dead, with a single bullet wound almost between the eyes, on the morning of 27 November 1995.

When she paraded for guard duty at 6.30am a friend saw her "smile and giggle in her normal way", and the lance corporal who drove her to her post said she "appeared to be her normal happy self". She had been out the previous weekend buying Christmas presents for her family and the only apparent cloud on her horizon was the need to choose between two army boyfriends.

Though army rules dictated that a woman must never do guard duty alone, Cheryl was dropped on her own, with a rifle, at the Royal Way gate at about 7am.

Her boyfriend (of the two, this was the newer) said he went to see her there at 7.30 and was told to leave by a major who passed by at 8.15. He said they kissed goodbye and arranged to meet later.

In the next few minutes a staff sergeant, a regimental sergeant major and a captain, were all let in at the gate by Cheryl, one ticking her off for not addressing him as "Sir". But then a captain entering the camp noticed that the barrier was up and unmanned. He continued to his office and then reported it.

A lance corporal drove to the gate to find no sign of Cheryl. Believing she may have gone to the toilet he manned the gate himself for a few minutes before noticing something in the trees near by. He flagged down another lance corporal and together they found Cheryl's body, her weapon at her side.

One might have expected this to ring alarm bells with those who knew of Sean Benton's death only 19 weeks earlier, but no – it was immediately assumed she had taken her own life and another slapdash investigation ensued.

The Surrey coroner later recorded an open verdict, saying he was "unable to explain how it is that a girl who one moment seems to be bubbly and outgoing should the next be found with a bullet in her". Once again time would shed a different light on events.

For when Surrey reopened the case after the fourth death at Deepcut in 2002, Cheryl's boyfriend gave different accounts of his dealings with her that morning.

First he said that after he left Cheryl he saw a mutual friend who was on his way to the gate to apologise to her for something that happened the night before, and that this friend later came back saying he could not find her. The friend, however, flatly denied that the conversation took place, or that he ever went near the gate that morning.

Later the boyfriend admitted his conversation with Cheryl at the gate was an argument. He knew she had seen her old boyfriend the night before and he said Cheryl had made a sexual comment which concerned him. He said Cheryl had told him she was going to sit in the trees and let all the cars in.

Blake sees nothing suspicious about the boyfriend changing his story, concluding blandly that he "should be treated with some caution" as a witness.

Once again all efforts to understand what happened are hampered by the failure to carry out even a basic forensic examination of the scene, the body or the weapon. The BKA, working on the slender information available, decided that although Cheryl's death was consistent with self-harm it was impossible to rule out the involvement of a third party.

But Blake does just that: he rules out third party involvement. He says the site was too busy and exposed for a premeditated attack (he doesn't even consider a spontaneous one) and since there was no sign of struggle Cheryl could only have been persuaded to go into the trees by someone she knew.

Blake recognises that the boyfriend was the only plausible candidate for luring her away from her post – but says there is no evidence to suggest that he did persuade her or wanted to. Yet the boyfriend had opportunity, means and a possible motive. And although the major ordered him to leave the gate at 8.15, *he did not see him go*. Moreover, the earliest independent witness of the boyfriend's presence back at barracks puts him there at about 9am – some 40 minutes after the death.

Frank Swann, the independent ballistics expert, believes murder a more likely scenario. Her body was found near some trees lying at 90 degrees to an incline, meaning she would have to have stood or sat at an awkward angle as she shot herself; a position against the tree or with her back to the slope would have been

more likely. Both the position of her hands and the black deposits pictured on them was consistent with her trying to force the weapon away from her face.

Instead Blake focuses on suicide and speculates that Cheryl's love life was causing her more concern than she outwardly displayed. He cites witnesses who said she had rows over cheating on her old boyfriend.

Blake also makes much of a psychological profile of Cheryl drawn up more than seven years later. But this was built up largely from the statements of friends at Deepcut, where she had been for only six months. They included the new boyfriend, who barely knew her. Her family were not asked to contribute.

Central to the profile, and also to Blake's reasoning about Cheryl, was her so-called history of self-harm. This was based on the suggestion that at the age of 15, following the suicide of a cousin, she had taken a drug overdose.

This does not reflect the full facts. According to her father, shortly after the cousin's death Cheryl announced to a friend at school that she had taken some tablets; the friend told a teacher and Cheryl was taken to hospital. There was no treatment and Cheryl said later she had taken five paracetamol. Afterwards, in fact, she assured her parents she could never inflict the sort of pain on her family that was caused by her cousin's suicide.

In order to make the case for suicide Blake also relies on evidence which he admits was "considered too slight to be called before the inquest" – a conversation allegedly overheard by an electrician, in which Cheryl supposedly said that if you can't afford to buy yourself out of the army, then the only way out was to put a gun to your head.

The Royal Way gate pictured from where Cheryl James' body was discovered in November 1995

Blake, in his report, mentions what "fair-minded people" might think. They might think, even on the evidence that they have been allowed to see, that the story of Cheryl's death is a lot more complicated that the simple suicide which Blake accepts.

the shootings

3. Geoff Gray

GEOFF GRAY was only 17 when he was found with two gunshot wounds to the forehead, one above each eye, in the early hours of 17 September, 2001. He had been on guard at the officers' mess with two other privates when he said he was going to patrol alone. Three to five minutes later his fellow guards heard what they described as a single shot, followed a split second later by a burst of fire. Others too reported hearing shots at about 01.15.

This was a week after 9/11 and the base was on heightened alert. The sergeant in the guardroom ordered his deputy to take two armed guards and head towards the officers' mess. When they got to the gate which Geoff had left, his fellow guards were agitated. One had his weapon loaded, announcing he was "ready to kill". He was apparently told to calm down.

The other three then went to search for Geoff. Although it was a small area, they found nothing and called for assistance. More than an hour passed before they spotted Geoff's body – in a spot one of them insisted they had searched. As they approached they heard what they thought was the fence rattling, and one said he thought he saw someone running away on the other side.

Despite this suggestion of an intruder, and despite the two bullet wounds to the head, each of which was sufficient to kill, once again there was an immediate assumption of suicide and the area was not treated as a crime scene. Just how poorly it was searched was revealed when Surrey police returned to the scene much later, after the fourth Deepcut death, and found a piece of human skull. It was Geoff's.

Geoff was by all accounts a model trainee, popular, enthusiastic, close to his family and on good terms with his old girlfriends. On the night he died he had been in touch with one of them, making arrangements to meet. He was an unlikely suicide case.

Earlier in his guard shift Geoff had been involved in an ugly confrontation with a civilian fire officer at the gate. The civilian was drunk, threatening and abusive to Geoff and his female guard companion, and he had no military ID. An NCO alerted by Geoff on the radio came to the gate and both men escorted the drunk to the officers' mess, where he was living and where his identity was confirmed.

Blake is convinced that the drunk played no part in Geoff's death, but although two army officers said they checked on him in his room in the officers' mess later that night, their evidence is not conclusive and it is not clear whether the man himself was ever interviewed by Surrey police.

Blake dismisses concerns about what happened to Geoff Gray's weapon after his death, and attempts to reassure by describing in detail how it was passed between police forces and experts and apparently still remains with Surrey police. What he fails to explain is that the weapon log – which could have proved that the weapon now with Surrey police was indeed the one allocated to Geoff that night – was removed from the armoury that night and later shredded.

Once again the BKA, relying on photographs, witness statements, Geoff's damaged beret and other fragments, concluded that while the involvement of a third party cannot be ruled out, his injuries were consistent with suicide. Once again Frank Swann maintains that the angle and distance between the two wounds – either one of which would have been instantly fatal – makes suicide highly unlikely. He had an unexplained bruise to his right shoulder and the position of his body with his head some 30cms from the perimeter fence and his feet pointing towards the side of a tree were consistent with being ambushed.

Blake (unlike the inquest which returned an open verdict) concludes that the balance of probabilities indicates that Geoff Gray killed himself. A killer, he argues, would have had to take Geoff's weapon without a struggle and then shoot him at near point-blank range. Unless he had his own weapon and swapped it for Geoff's after firing.

Blake *is* perplexed why a healthy, enthusiastic recruit would kill himself, but again he makes a special effort to find suicidal tendencies. Apparently Geoff was quiet after he spoke to a girlfriend that night and had earlier complained of boredom after two 24-hour guard duties, saying "I feel like shooting myself". But the most bizarre leap of logic relates to Geoff's mobile phone. Stored among the phone numbers was this: "Date died ...1744".

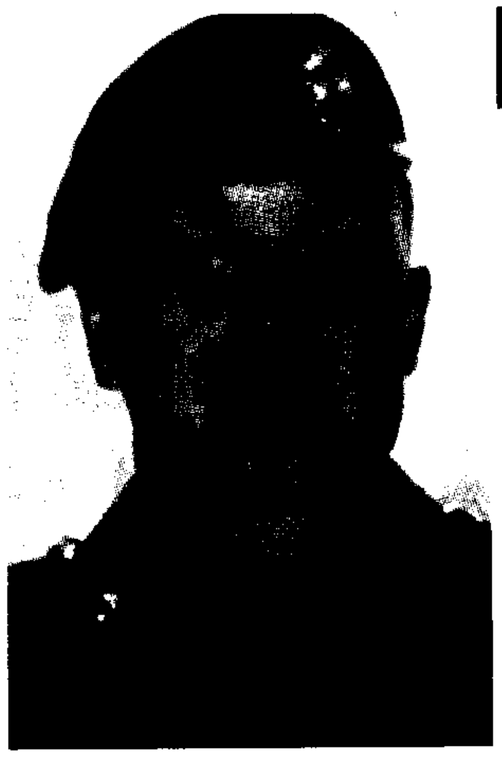
Geoff died in the early hours of the 17th of the month and this entry was stored at entry number 16 (to Blake, in a Dan Brown moment, the night before) and he seized upon it to suggest that "if it was inserted by Geoff, it provides further support for a morbid state of mind on the night of the 16th September 2001". It was in fact Geoff's odd way of remembering his bank account pin numbers.

In his keenness to see the death as a suicide Blake even puts forward the proposition, which Geoff's parents find ridiculous, that he was simply curious to know what it is like to shoot oneself with a powerful weapon.

Again a "fair-minded" person might want an adequate explanation as to why it took so long to find Geoff's body, for the bruising on his body, as to why the police didn't take more interest, what the drunken fire officer has to say for himself and what the forensic reports actually show?

the shootings

4. James Collinson



PRIVATE JAMES COLLINSON, from Perth, was 17 years and three months old when he was found dead from a single gunshot wound to the head while on night guard duty at Deepcut on 22 March 2002 – four days after the inquest into the death of Geoff Gray.

Last March, after a three-week inquest, a jury was presented with a choice of possible findings: suicide, accidental death and an open verdict, the last of which was defined as meaning that "the evidence does not fully disclose the means whereby cause of death arose". They recorded an open verdict.

Blake's review did not look at this case in detail, leaving it to the inquest: this is why his findings relate only to the first three deaths.

Superficially the evidence in the Collinson case seemed to point to suicide. Another trainee testified that James had borrowed his gun, saying that he wanted to go on patrol so that he could smoke a cigarette (forbidden while on guard duty). Shortly afterwards a shot rang out and a few minutes later James's body was found near the perimeter fence, the rifle at his side.

A single shot had been fired from under his chin and his brains had been blown out. It was the gun at his side that had fired this bullet; one shot was missing from its magazine. Two other young soldiers later testified that James had spoken that same night of his intention to kill himself.

As the inquest jury found, however, it was not as simple as it seemed. For a start, pretty well everything about James's life and conduct in the previous hours and days pointed to a mood of optimism and confidence.

The army itself acknowledged that James was on course for a successful career in one of the most glamorous jobs his corps could offer: as an air despatcher. He was also, according to those who knew him, fun-loving, a joker, popular, full of life and "army-barmy" – he had dreamed of enlisting since childhood James Collinson was on nobody's at-risk list, nor was he a victim of bullying. So what about the suggestion that he spoke of suicide?

Private Michael Foody testified that James, while watching television in the guardhouse before going on duty, said: "If I have a rifle tonight, I'll kill myself." He said it was said in a light way and no-one took it seriously. But although Foody said between six and eight others were in the room, no one else said they heard the remark.

Private Scott Smith testified that later that evening, when travelling by minibus to the guard gate, James made a very similar comment. Again, though others were present no one else heard this, and, like Foody, Smith did not report it until after James's death.

Everyone else who spoke to James that night reported him to be in his usual good form. As he boarded the minibus he spotted his girlfriend, a fellow soldier, and made an arrangement to see her later, saying excitedly that he had something to tell her.

By this time Deepcut had stopped issuing guns to soldiers under 17 years and 6 months, so James went on guard duty armed only with a torch, and was accompanied by two armed, older trainees, John Donnelly and Stacey McGrath. It was Donnelly who said he lent James his rifle so that he could go for a smoke, but again this was not corroborated, because McGrath said he was behind the guard hut at the time, phoning his girlfriend.

James left no note. Everyone who knew him was stunned by his death, and his parents remain convinced it was not suicide.

Besides this tragic mystery the death raises important questions, of which the first relates to Surrey police. They were on the spot promptly and in number, and for the first time in this series of deaths they "asserted primacy" over the military police.

The detective in charge, however, Inspector Simon Humphreys, did not visit the scene on the night but spoke to officers there by phone. Consequently, as he admitted at the inquest, he was unaware of the Gray death very near the same spot six months earlier. If he had turned up he would almost certainly have been told of it.

Humphreys decided James's death was insufficiently suspicious to merit a full post mortem: it was carried out by a hospital pathologist, rather than a forensic specialist. No blood-spatter photographs were taken either. Nor did anyone ever check the clothing of McGrath or Donnelly, or anyone else, for marks or blood.

Four months passed before a full statement was taken from a corporal who was both one of the last to speak to James (a friendly, relaxed chat) and one of the first at the death scene. As for Private McGrath, he made a very short statement on the night, but it seems to have taken six weeks to get back to him for a proper account.

And though the scene was supposedly thoroughly searched, a cap badge that was almost certainly James's was found in a second search eight months later.

But if Surrey police failed to cover themselves in glory, neither did the army. In terms of the events of the night, it turned out that the record in the guardroom log was "non-contemporaneous" – composed later –while it had to be admitted that there was no record at all of who had been issued with which gun on the night.

Though in some ways the inquest into James's death was a more exacting affair than Nicholas Blake's review – and than the previous three inquests – it was not remotely comprehensive or conclusive. Inquests have limited remits, so army policy and police conduct were never explored, and John Cooper, counsel for the Collinson family, was repeatedly prevented from exploring avenues the family thought important. This was why the coroner himself endorsed calls for a public inquiry.

who's to blame

J'accuse... nobody at all

IN THE OPENING PAGES of his review, Nicholas Blake quotes with approval some words of Des James, the father of Cheryl James, summarising the concerns of the Deepcut families: "Everything comes back to accountability and confidence that whatever corrective actions are in place ... prevent a recurrence."

However, Blake's report fails in the very matter of accountability. For him, no individual is to blame.

No matter how dreadfully things went wrong at Deepcut, no one is held to account. Never once does Blake say: "This person, who was paid by the taxpayer to do a job, failed in his duty," or "That person, who made that decision, must assume responsibility for what followed."

Official inquiries routinely apportion blame and Blake's remit allowed him to do the same – yet he did not do so.

A public inquiry should consider the following.

Deepcut was a blunder from the day in 1993 when the army hurriedly merged three strands of training – standard recruit training, training for women and training for under-17s (you can enlist at 16 years and 9 months) – into one.

A new training programme was also introduced. It began in familiar style with 12 hectic weeks of basic training, known as Phase 1, but then followed a half-baked arrangement, Phase 2, in which trainees waited around while the army tried to arrange courses for them and, eventually, posted them to their final units.

In the Royal Logistics Corps – a unit which, because of its unglamorous character tends to get the weaker recruits – Phase 2 meant Deepcut. From 1993 on, therefore, about 1,000 trainees passed through Deepcut per year, more than a quarter of them women and many of them still 17. Just out of school, away from home for the first time and of mixed abilities (illiteracy was a big problem), they were dumped in Deepcut with not enough to do and no clear idea where they were going.

To cap it all, Deepcut was under-staffed and under-funded at the outset, and was soon subjected to swingeing cuts. A properly staffed modern training establishment has one member of staff to 38 recruits. Through 1995-2002 Deepcut at best had a ratio of one to 60, with one to 100 common. The ratio at night, when many staff went home, could reach one to 300.

Such were the essential ingredients of the Deepcut scandal, in which a public institution failed outrageously in its duty of care to

the vulnerable young people in its charge. Who was responsible for mixing this deadly cocktail?

Nicholas Blake never even asked, but here are some candidates: **Sir Malcolm Rifkind,** was Defence Secretary in 1992-5, and **Sir Jeremy Hanley** was his armed forces minister, pushing through drastic cuts in costs. The head of the army was **Field Marshal Sir Peter Inge.** All three should be asked for explanations.

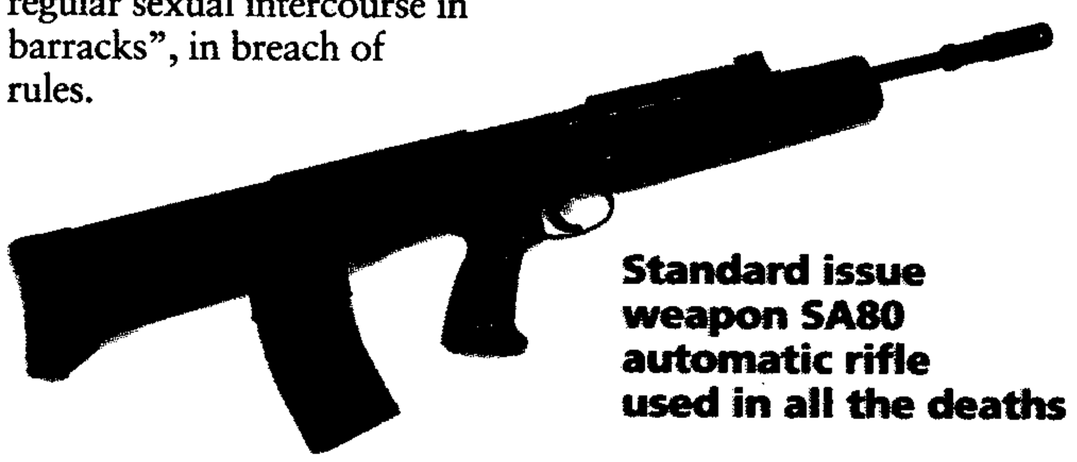
And below them? The documents, if we could see them, must show which soldiers and civil servants wrote the key restructuring recommendations. Blake didn't, but a public inquiry could find them and ask why they exposed teenage volunteers to such risk.

But it wasn't all about policy failure: there were people managing Deepcut in 1995-2002. Blake emphasises how "challenging" this was, but did they rise to the challenge? He never says.

Off the radar

A key figure is **Lieutenant Colonel Nigel Josling,** commanding officer in 1995, when Sean Benton and Cheryl James died. This was a time of bullying and arbitrary punishment, of hard drinking – by everyone from 17-year-olds to sergeant-majors – and frequent fighting. Deepcut in darkness, admits Blake, was "an intimidating place".

Sexual activity was rampant. One official report found that women trainees "virtually without exception ... were having regular sexual intercourse in barracks", in breach of rules.



Standard issue weapon SA80 automatic rifle used in all the deaths

Men routinely entered women's accommodation and vice versa, also breaking the rules. When Deepcut's grounds were raked in preparation for an open day, 800 used condoms were collected. Soldiers were even coming in from other bases to have sex.

The staff shortage probably didn't make much difference here, because quite a few were joining in. NCOs routinely "fraternised" with trainees, often in women's quarters – serious disciplinary matters – and many allegations later emerged of NCOs abusing their authority to get trainees into bed.

How does Lt Col Josling account for this? "Not on my radar," he told Blake – he never noticed and no one told him. Even Blake had trouble swallowing this, but Josling insisted: "That's exactly the sort of feedback and overview one would get if we had adequate supervisory staff."

You might think that with so few staff he would get to know them well, but he had no idea about Sergeant "twin brother" B, Andrew Gavaghan, the alleged bully who was also accused of sexual harrassement. Josling thought he was "quite caring, quite imaginative".

When it comes to what he did to make things better at Deepcut, Josling seems to have been a victim of poor record-keeping. He wanted guard duty reformed, he told Blake, but Blake found no paperwork to confirm this. He complained about staff shortages, he said, but those letters are lost. And he set up a "risk register" after Sean Benton's death, but no papers survive.

And he doesn't get much help from his boss at the time, **Brigadier Paul Evans.** It was Evans who, after Cheryl James's death, took it upon himself to write what became known as the Evans Report, listing reforms needed to prevent further deaths. By Josling's own account, Evans thought the Deepcut management in 1995 showed inertia, inflexibility and lack of imagination.

Blake never criticises Josling, who has since been promoted.

He left Deepcut early in 1996, to be replaced by **Lieutenant Colonel David Harding,** said by a senior subordinate to have been "significantly tighter" on discipline. Before long no fewer than three majors were moved on, and Blake notes that Harding's "interview book" – seeing people who are in trouble – was far thicker than Josling's.

But Harding and his boss, **Brigadier Tony Dalby-Welsh** (Evans too had moved on), turn out to be poor judges of character. Take Lieutenant C, another alleged sexual predator: Though Evans had advised against, Dalby-Welsh "strongly" recommended him for a new contract in 1996. When C got that contract he moved to a different base, where an outraged commanding officer was soon complaining about his "falsehoods", "crass mismanagement" and "arrogant and cavalier behaviour". Whoops!

Far worse, though, is the case of Leslie Skinner, a 34-year-old soldier transferred to Deepcut in 1996 *after* picking up a conviction for flashing at a teenage boy in Northern Ireland. (It was his third such offence.) Harding assigned Skinner to, of all places, the gym, where, incredibly, he worked alongside another convicted sex offender. And months later, when Skinner was offered a transfer to Middlesbrough, Harding effectively endorsed his request to stay at Deepcut.

Whitewash won't wash

Throughout, Skinner was sexually assaulting teenage soldiers who used the gym, and when one of them complained, according to Blake, he was denounced on parade as "gay" by a sergeant-major. Though Skinner was reported and an investigation began, he remained at Deepcut another six months.

What does Blake have to say? Deepcut had a "difficult task" dealing with Skinner, and the story is "remarkable", "difficult to understand" and, at its worst, "inexplicable".

But Blake criticises no one – not the unnamed officer who posted a sex offender to a training barracks, not the lieutenant colonel who assigned him to the gym, not the sergeant-major who intimidated his accuser, not the Military Police officers who uncovered only a fraction of his offences, and not the unnamed author of the subsequent army whitewash. No one was to blame.

Meanwhile, what was being done to ensure there was no repeat of the Benton and James affairs? Harding read the Evans report and acted on it so far as he could, beefing up welfare provision, but Evans's main recommendations were not in his power to implement.

Evans wanted professional military guards used at the barracks, to ease the burden of long, boring and lonely assignments on young trainees and, in particular, to reduce the opportunity for them to shoot themselves. And he also urged the army to increase staffing at Deepcut so that trainees could be kept more active and supervised more effectively, with a better chance of spotting those at risk. Both suggestions were meant to save lives. Both implied extra spending. Neither was adopted.

In 1996-8, further reports pointed out that the suicide rate in the army was twice that of the civilian population, also higher than the other armed services and that the commonest method was by gunshot. Again they recommended caution about giving vulnerable teenage recruits access to guns. Again though, nothing was done. Blake's verdict: "*It is a concern* that this continued to be overlooked."

Out of control

Dalby-Welsh and Harding insist they pressed their bosses at the Army Training and Recruitment Agency (ATRA) for more staff and were rebuffed, though the record on this is thin. Blake remarks that it was only a matter of luck that no one died in this period.

When a new brigadier, **Tweedie Brown,** arrived in 1999 he protested more vigorously to ATRA about staff-trainee ratios, then at one corporal to 120 trainees, or 10 times the army standard. Staff were struggling to cope with disciplinary problems, illiteracy and an outbreak of sexually transmitted disease – more than 100 trainees were infected.

Brown's complaints were going to the ATRA boss, **Major General Andrew Palmer,** and his response was simple: "We have no alternative but to manage ATRA business within the resource restrictions imposed upon us." In other words, stop bleating and get on with it. So how were things at Deepcut? Here is a description of the camp in 2001, by a sergeant who worked elsewhere but knew it well: "Deepcut was run by the recruits. It was out of control. No control at all. After working hours it was like Glasgow or London on a Saturday night. This was every night. For example at the disco at the NAAFI mid-week. Recruits were completely drunk. Both sexes. Staff would be needed to stop fights... There was a party atmosphere."

By mid-2001 the commanding officer was **Lieutenant Colonel Ron Laden,** who would later accept that he was in charge of a "sink regiment". Described as "of crusading spirit", Laden cracked down on sexual activity and drinking so firmly that ATRA was worried he was too harsh, and he got rid of several errant NCOs. He also pushed staff into keeping the trainees busier, to such an extent that some NCOs became ill from overwork.

But the real problems were still ones he could not solve: six years after the Evans Report there were still not nearly enough staff, and armed guard duty was still exposing trainees to unacceptable risk.

What was ATRA doing? General Palmer had stirred himself to commission **Lieutenant Colonel Richard Haes** to study duty of care and supervisory ratios across the whole of army training. Haes reported in April 2001, just as Laden arrived at Deepcut.

"The system is failing," he warned. "The current situation is tenable only as long as there is no major incident or complaint." ATRA needed 330 more staff, of which 62 should go to Deepcut, and it must also make much more effort to identify at-risk groups and must use professional military guards.

Here was a direct echo of the 1995 Evans Report – and again none of it was adopted.

General Palmer has since tried to rubbish the Haes report as impractical and Blake has concluded that Palmer never referred the problems of staffing and guarding upwards to his superiors or ministers. Despite warnings from Haes and others, in other words, he never even asked for more money. Palmer's explanation for this is remarkable.

What with Bosnia, Kosovo, Sierra Leone and foot and mouth, he told a Commons committee, the army was heavily committed in these years, and the front line was very short of men. "There was significant risk operationally in the Field Army at that time. In order to look at these risks and how to mitigate their effects, a study was undertaken to see whether or not the support organisation – which includes the training organisation – could help reduce the undermanning... About 250 people were moved out of the training organisation into the front line... Essentially ... this was an attempt to balance the various risks which existed."

So, far from increasing the training staff, as the reports urged and the Deepcut commander demanded, the army was reducing it, and Palmer accepted this as a calculated risk. If there were no professional guards at Deepcut, if there was no suicide risk assessment, and if there was inadequate supervision, *that was a matter of official policy.*

Palmer's gamble

Soon after the Haes report was shelved Geoff Gray died at Deepcut – an unsupervised trainee on guard duty with a firearm. And six months after that so did James Collinson.

What does Palmer think of his gamble now? Blake tells us that even with the benefit of hindsight, Palmer told him he would not have acted differently. But Palmer told the Commons committee something very different: "It was all a matter of trying to balance the risk and in so doing... I accept completely that we got that wrong."

What is Blake's verdict? What does he have to say about the policy decision that exposed teenage trainees to risk in defiance of a whole string of warnings? This: "The review does not pretend to be able to form a judgement on the competing demands for resources that the defence budget must inevitably face." In other words, if the army is taking such a huge gamble, who is Blake to question it?

Palmer was promoted to Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff and given a CBE. He has since retired. He would be a key witness at a public inquiry.

After James Collinson's death and the media coverage that resulted, something miraculous happened. Where two deaths had brought no change and three deaths was still not too many, four deaths did the trick: soon staff were flooding into Deepcut, and so were professional guards.

ATRA, however, accepted no blame, its internal inquiry recording merely that "the guarding regime at Deepcut *inadvertently* created an extraordinarily high level of opportunity risk". Inadvertently? We can only wonder. The man who wrote that, a **Major General Charlton-Weedy**, should justify it at a public inquiry.

As for Nicholas Blake, the very worst that he can find to say about the army's conduct over the whole Deepcut affair is that it was "disappointing". *Disappointing?*

Deepcut: the conclusions

Over... and out?

DESPITE ITS SHORTCOMINGS, the Blake review did come up with a series of important recommendations. With the exception of the last (saying there was now no need for a public inquiry) the other 33 were meant to help lift the veil of secrecy over the fate of the four recruits and ensure that others like them are no longer exposed to such risks.

So how have they gone down? Some had already been implemented, so won't make any difference. But, worryingly, the most important have been rejected by the government, the army and the police:

- Ministers rejected Blake's demand for a fully independent ombudsman to investigate complaints – instead opting for a "service complaints commissioner" who would merely monitor the usual chain of command.
- The government has rejected the request that those under 17 should be trained in separate units from adults.
- It has rejected the suggestion that recruits must have reached the age of 18 before being sent to join their field units.
- It has rejected the recommendation that trainees can only carry out armed guard duties under supervision; it remains the case that 17-year-olds may still carry guns on guard duty providing they are not alone.
- Unhappy under-18-year-olds will not, as Blake suggests, be able to leave the army as of a right.
- There will be not be any *automatic* disciplinary action against anyone who fails to report bullying or abuse as recommended.
- Neither will complaints of mistreatment, bullying and harassment be automatically investigated by the Royal Military Police – the lesser ones will still go through the chain of command.
- The government has rejected Blake's call for automatic legal aid for families so they can get legal advice or representation at inquests or fatal accident inquiries.
- The MoD has rejected his recommendation that the family be able to attend an army board of inquiry into a death and see all the evidence presented to it.
- And finally – despite the recommendation from Blake that the families be give access to all the police reports and all the supporting evidence and witness statements gathered by them – neither the Surrey reports nor the Devon & Cornwall report have been handed over.

So what was the point of spending nearly £1 million on the Blake review, other than to silence criticism? No new witness was interviewed, let alone cross-examined. Gaping anomalies and inconsistencies remain.

We know that Deepcut was at times out of control, with vulnerable young trainees exposed to risks their parents could not have imagined, and we know more about the bullying, sex, drink, and the flouting of rules – notably those concerning firearms.

What we don't have are accounts of the four deaths in which we can see that the evidence and the witnesses have been challenged and the anomalies have been confronted rather than ducked. We don't have nearly sufficient assurances that where the army and police have made changes they will stick. And we don't have any evidence of accountability at work – pretty well everyone involved, apart from the four recruits themselves (and Leslie Skinner, who went to jail), has escaped sanction of any kind, so far as we know.

Blake's review was built on poor foundations, since it relied almost unquestioningly on a re-investigation by the same police force which made the fundamental errors after the bodies were found. Because both the Surrey police findings and the Devon & Cornwall report are secret, no one can judge their quality. Even the expert reports are withheld, when the whole point of expert evidence is that it should be peer-tested.

Article two of the European Convention on Human Rights provides that where someone has died who is under the care of the state – a thorough and independent inquiry with the participation of the family must take place.

None of the police inquiries, or the inquests, or the Defence Committee investigation or Blake's review, meets that standard. Even the coroner at the end of James Collinson's inquest added his weight to the demands for a public inquiry. That is the only way out of the tragic mess of the Deepcut affair.

BETRAYED? Yvonne Collinson, Geoff Gray, Diane Gray, Des James and Doreen James read out a statement following publication of Nicholas Blake's Deepcut review

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon), retiring on 31 February 2007!

Hullo!

And I'd like to begin with an apology to the parish. I'm really sorry that other people have behaved so badly. Honestly, what must they think of us, when they see their popular, charismatic and successful vicar being attacked for no reason at all?

Yes, I'm sorry for this shameful behaviour and I don't mind being the one to take the blame and apologise on their behalf.

In the ten long years I have spent serving this parish 9/11 *(Surely 24/7? Ed.)*, never in my wildest imaginings could I have imagined that some members of my own flock, who owe everything to my stewardship of St Albion's, would turn on me and try to force me out of my own vicarage!

These were the very people I had nurtured like a good shepherd caring for his sheep.

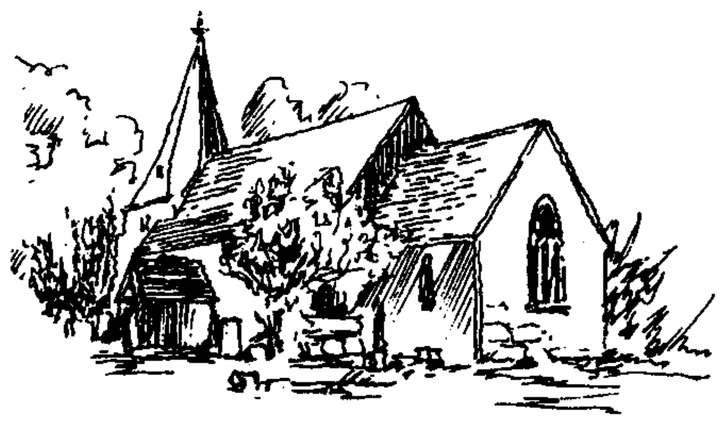
And if one went astray, as they often did, I did not leave them to become the prey of hungry wolves. I sought them out and brought them back into the fold – some of them many times, as Mr Blunkett, Mr Mandelson, Mr Byers and Mr Prescott would be the first to testify!

I am not going to name names – as you know, that has never been my policy – and, in any case, the individual I am going to name is someone who plays such an insignificant part in parish life that you will not have heard of him.

And neither had I, until last week when, out of the blue, he wrote me a very rude and unhelpful letter, to say that unless I resigned as vicar, he would feel obliged to stand down from his duties photocopying this newsletter and stapling it together before Mrs Blears delivers it on her bike.

The name of this poisonous little nobody is Tom Watson.

The Parish Treasurer showing his support for the vicar – as seen by local artist Mr de la Nougerede



Tom who? I hear you ask. Exactly! Which is why I was planning to sack him in any case, even though I hadn't heard of him!

Now, of course, his name will be remembered for ever more, whenever the subject of treachery is raised.

I gather also that there has been tittle-tattle in the Britannia Arms, saying that the Treasurer, Mr Brown, was actually behind Mr Watson's letter and that Gordon was hatching some sort of plot against me.

But Gordon has given me his word that he had nothing to do with it and I fully accept his assurance, even though I don't believe a word of it.

Mr Brown's story, that Mr Watson drove 200 miles to drop in on Gordon's holiday home in the Isle of Dull just to take a cuddly toy for little Angus, is, of course, ridiculous.

But I am happy to accept that this is indeed what happened – even though it didn't. Likewise, Gordon's claim that he was smiling about his new baby when he left the vicarage, having told me to pack my bags and give him the key, is patently untrue. Though, once again, I am happy to accept that this is indeed what happened – even though it clearly didn't.

But enough of this. I know that you are all heartily sick of this silly squabbling. You want more than anything to draw a line under this and to move on. I know you do. So let's draw up a timetable but a **real** timetable of what the parish needs to achieve.

1. Peace in the Holy Land. Doesn't even the mention of my mission to the Middle East make some of you feel ashamed for your small-mindedness? Hey, let's open that window of opportunity and let the dove of peace fly in – or out, as the case may be.

2. And what about our new Primark Beacon Technology Academy? And our new Burger King Hospital, motto: *Fat For Purpose*? And what about the criminal gangs roaming around the recreation ground frighting old ladies?

3. And what about all the other things that need to be done, like turning the Millennium Tent into a Super Casino, bringing much-needed gambling to the parish?

That's what I know you are really concerned about – not a lot of silly gossip about personalities. As I said, we've moved on from that and drawn a line under it. Particularly, Gordon and his friends.

Shall I tell you a story from the Bible? There was once a just and holy man who went about doing good. Some said he was the Messiah, though he was too modest to accept this description. And he went about performing miracles. But then one of his disciples betrayed his leader after they broke bread together in the upper room of a fashionable restaurant. And then do you know what happened? He took his own life, so disgusted was he by his own treachery.

It's not a nice story, is it, but it may serve as a warning to others who are considering betraying their spiritual leader. So let's hear no more of the tawdry tittle-tattle and concentrate on the important job of making sure that Gordon Brown never becomes Vicar.

Yours, Tony

Parish Postbag

Dear Vicar,

After long and careful thought, we the undersigned feel that it is time for the vicar to

Yours sincerely,
Jim Nobody, Sid Loser,
Mike Hasbeen and Sue Saddo

■ This letter has been cut for reasons of space and some of the names of the writers have been changed to protect their identities and to make them look silly. T.B.

Dear Vicar,

I would like to put on record how much I hate Gordon Brown. He is stupid, stupid, stupid. And I have nothing but total contempt for this looney loser, who is unfit to even think about being vicar.

Yours sincerely,
Charles Clarke,
c/o Oddbins, Tesco Road

■ For reasons of space, this letter has been printed in full. T.B.

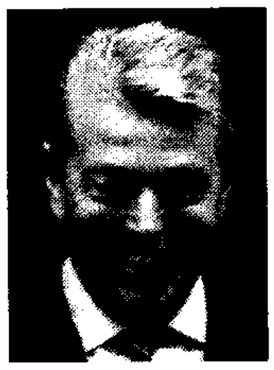
Dear Sir,

Whilst not wishing to add to the unhelpful controversy over the parish leadership, may I just offer my conviction that Mr Brown is not only "autistic", but a manic depressive, a sufferer from Tourette's and a dangerous psychopathic who should never have been released into the community.

It gives me no pleasure to write this, but ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha.

Yours,
P. Mandelson,
Rue des Matelots, Bruxelles.

New Faces On The PCC

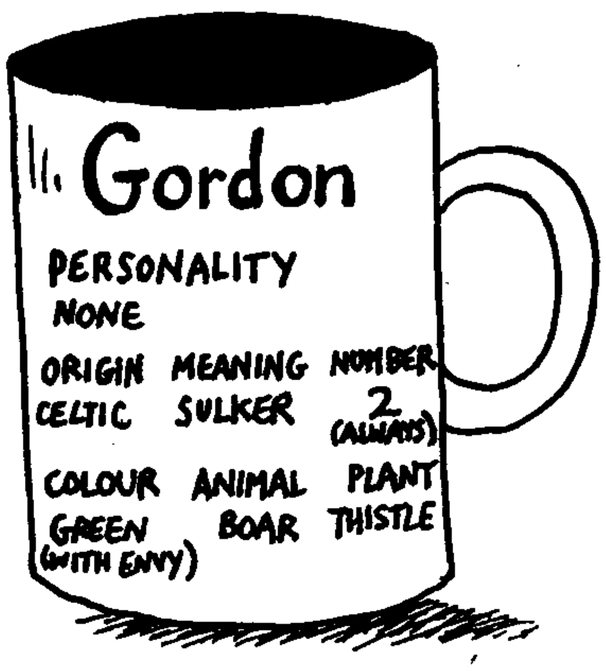


Many of you will have noticed in the last week that wherever I go, I am accompanied by a charming, well-groomed, smartly-dressed and English man. His name is Alan Johnson and you'll be seeing a lot more of Alan (solid English name, note!) in the future.

He's got a lot to offer. First of all, he's English. Secondly, he's not Scottish. And, thirdly, he's not called Gordon.

Welcome aboard, Alan. Good to have you in the team. And you have many of the qualities that make a good vicar. You're English, not Scottish and *(You've said this. Ed.)*

SPECIAL OFFER



Many of you were kind enough to say how much you liked the vicar's "Anthony" mug which he has been drinking from recently. Now the newsletter is offering a special "Gordon" mug (or "Smug" as I call it!!)

Here is the design by local artist Mr Newman. Anyone who wants one should write at once to their psychiatrist! T.B.

Thought for the Week

by Mr John Prescott from the Working Men's Club

I have one message to the so called infighters in the parish and it is this: **"Don't you idiots realise how foolish you're making us look"**

(Thanks to local artist Mr Jolley for this thoughtful picture of Mr Prescott. T.B.)

How Things Would Be Different Under Gordon

My policy is always to drink tea, but Gordon, as you can clearly see, prefers black coffee. This explains why he is always so nervous, twitchy, sweaty and untrustworthy. If you want to be vicar, Gordon, take my advice and switch beverages at once!

The Vicar.

PARISH PORTRAITS NO. 94

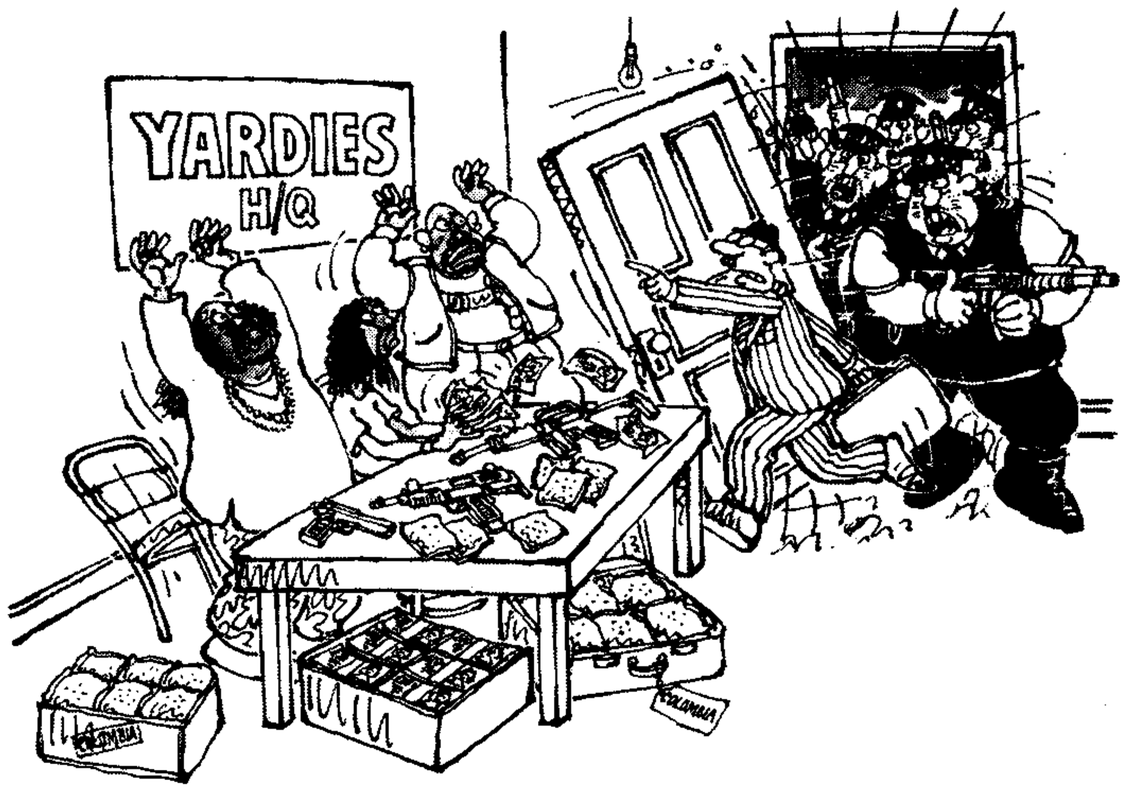
Mr Brown is seen here saying his prayers and asking God to make him a better person and not to tell so many lies! T.B.

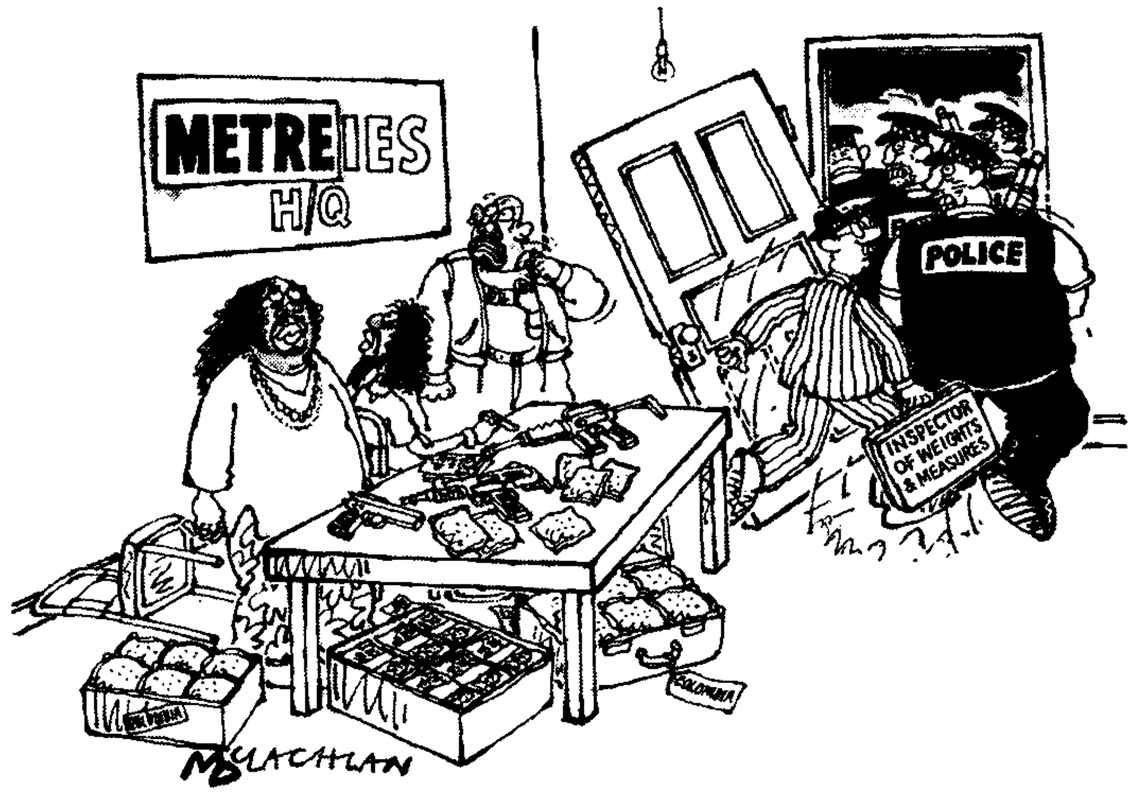
A Personal Message Of Support From The Rev. Dubya Of The Church Of The Latter-Day Morons

To All The Good People Over There In Bonnie England-land

Yo, and again I say, yo! I have been asked by your good pastor, the Rev. Tommy Blur, to send a few words of support as he walks through the valley of the shadow. Let me say that whensoever I have asked Pastor Bloom to perform any service in our great crusade to overcome evilitude and terrority, however humble or ignoble that service may be, he has always leaped unstintingly to answer my every call. Sadly, however, on this occasion I have one or two little problems of my own, with a number of my Moronic followers suggesting that I myself may no longer be worthy of the title Chief Moron. I therefore, regrettably, must decline the Rev. Blog's cry for help in his hour of need, as Gordon's Gang rides into town! It's every man for himself! You're on your own, asshole!

Yours in the Lord,
Rev. Dubya



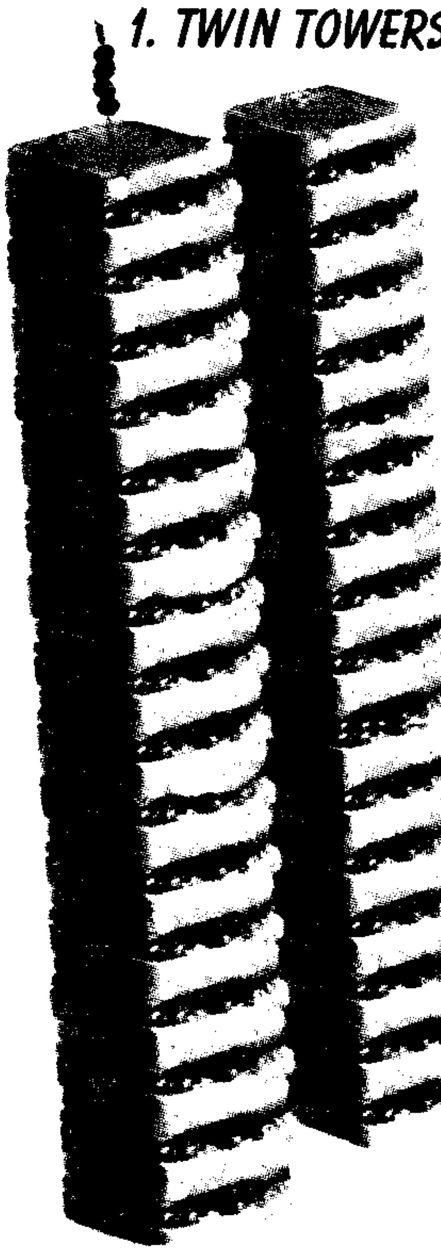


Advertisement

Following the successful cartoon version of their report, the 9/11 commission is proud to offer a new easily digestible way to remember the world's greatest tragedy told in a simple patronising format that they think the American people will be able to understand.

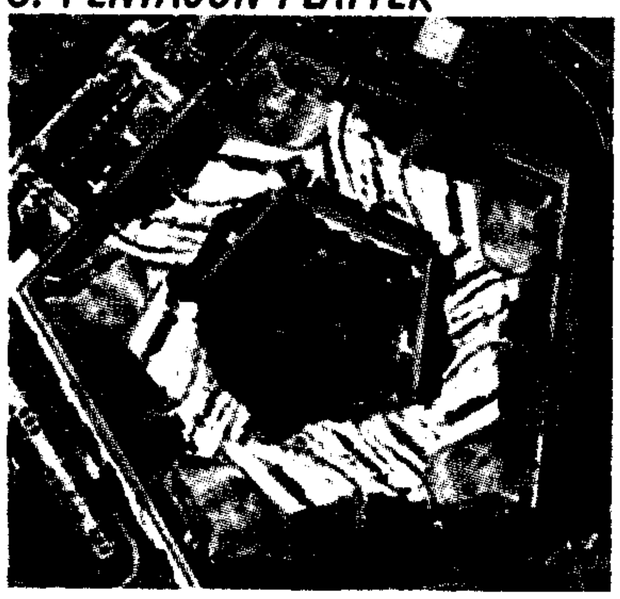
THE 9/11 SANDWICH TRIBUTE

1. TWIN TOWERS TRIBUTE



2. TRIBUTE TO THE PLANES

3. PENTAGON PLATTER



(That's enough bad taste. Ed.)

'DOME WILL CREATE THOUSANDS OF JOBS,' Says US Philanthropist

by Our Man In Greenwich **Lunchtime 0'2**

IN A bid to regenerate a run-down corner of south-east London, an American multi-millionaire has pledged billions of dollars to bring back the long-disused 'Dome site' into active use as a centre for local employment.

Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell last night paid fulsome tribute to the "astonishing generosity" of Las Vegas-based Mr Otis J. Fastbuckz in agreeing to reopen the Dome as an "art and leisure complex".

"Though nothing has yet been finalised," said Culture Secretary Mrs Jowell, "we see this as a truly exciting and imaginative scheme, which could provide much-needed jobs for thousands of Bulgarian immigrants when they arrive here next year."

No Place Like Dome

Already, advertisements have appeared in local papers all over Latvia, appealing for art and leisure operatives, such as croupiers, bar staff and bouncers.

Greenwich's MP, Sir Nicholas Raynsford-Park, also welcomed "our good friend Mr Fastbuckz's generous offer".

"Although nothing has yet been agreed," he said, "this will be a shot in the arm for local businesses, such as debt collectors, bailiffs and sex workers, who will see our new arts centre as a honeypot for gullible idiots from all over England and possibly the world."

Der Telegraf Spee
DREI PFENNINGS

HOW THE LEADER IS PREPARING TO BOW OUT

AN ASTONISHING leaked memo reveals how his inner circle of advisers are planning the retirement of the man who for the past twelve years has dominated the world scene.

Under the personal supervision of Josef Goebbels, the Chief Oberspinmeister of the fast-crumbling Hitler regime, the Führer's staff have been preparing for months a programme of carefully choreographed events which will allow their leader to end his career in a blaze of glory.

The document, which has been declared as "100 percent authentic" by the late Lord Dacre (Hugh Trevor-Ropey), sets out in meticulous detail how the Führer's closest advisers wish to see him leave the stage "on a high", with his reputation and dignity intact.

a full-length interview on Lord Haw Haw's popular Germany Calling show.

Reichstag At Bay

The main theme of the planned extravaganza will be "The Triumph of Nazism".

According to the memo, *"AH must be seen to be stepping down from office in a way which leaves the crowds wanting more.*

"When the curtain comes down and AH takes his final bow, the audience must be on their feet shouting encore, encore."

Dr Goebbels goes on to propose a series of high-profile media events designed to show the departing Führer not just as one of the greatest war leaders in history, but also as a truly caring father of his people, who loved Jews and gypsies.

"AH should be booked in now for a full-length interview on Lord Haw Haw's popular Germany Calling show.

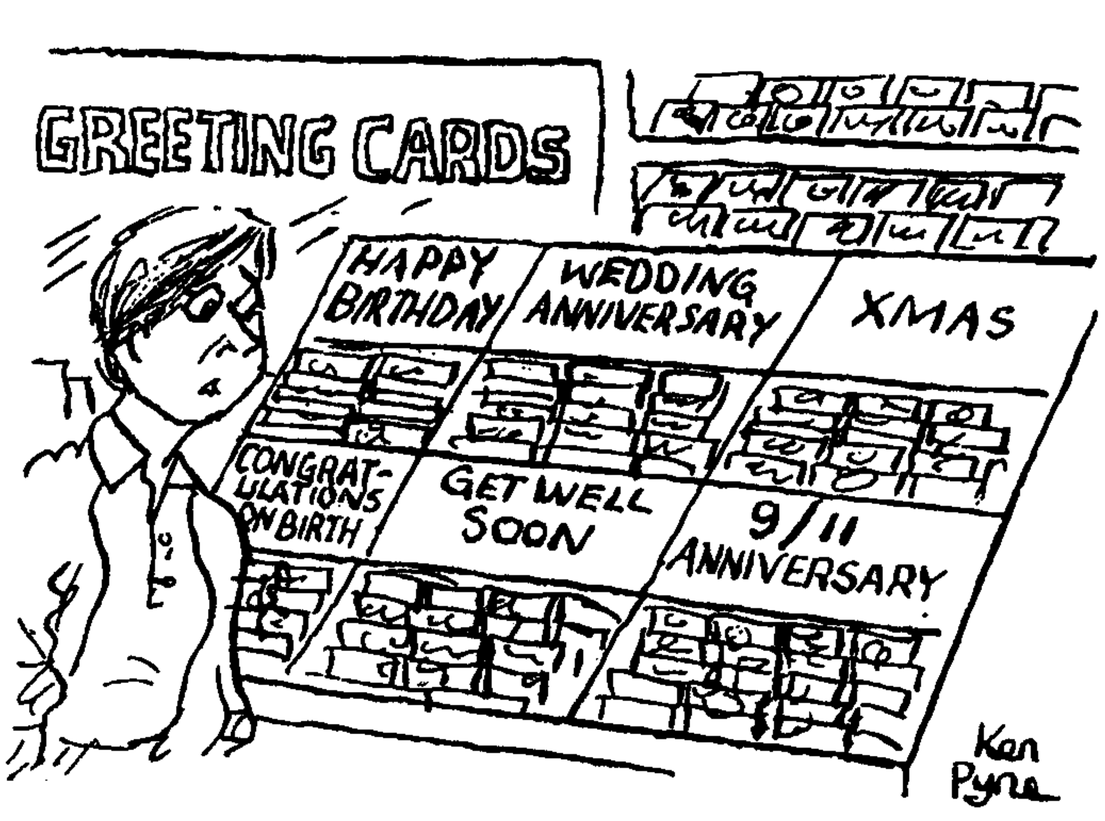
New Labour Camp

"AH should be invited to appear on Marching Songs of Praise, to introduce a selection of his favourite military music.

"AH should then go on a triumphal tour of what's left of our great German cities, such as Hamburg, Cologne and Dresden."

The memo acknowledges that *"the Second World War continues to cast something of a shadow over the Fuhrer's record in office,"* but Dr Goebbels describes this as *"the elephant in the bunker, which has to be exterminated by any means."*

The memo concludes *"Are we up to it? Is AH up to it? Perhaps the final solution will be for AH to win the sympathy of the world by some dramatic and heroic act, such as shooting himself. Only in this way can we stop Evil von Brown taking over, and will the thousands years of Blairism live on for ever."*



'WE KNEW LIB DEM LEADER WAS INCAPABLE, BUT WE COVERED IT UP' New Book's Amazing Claim

by Our Political Staff **Peter O'Bore**

A NEW book sensationally reveals that senior Liberal Democrats deliberately hushed up the fact that their leader, Chinese-born Ming Campbell, 97, was frequently "totally useless".

Colleagues recall one incident where Campbell was due to put a devastating question to Tony Blair on the subject of pensions reform.

"We went to fetch him down to the Chamber," says one, "and we found him sitting with his head in his hands, asking 'What am I going to say?'"

They put out a story at the time that he had been "taken ill", but the real truth is that he was very, very old and should never have been given the job in the first place.

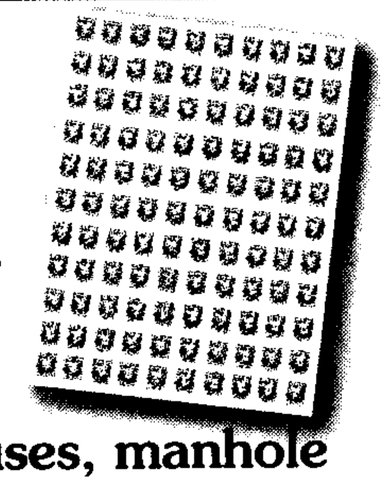
Another senior colleague reveals in the book how he had urged Ming to seek "professional advice" and change his lifestyle, by wearing baseball caps, roller-blading to the House of Commons and installing a wind turbine in his greenhouse.

Ming agreed, but he lacked the will to go through with it, and soon fell back to his old ways, wearing a three-piece suit and spending his days trying to do the Daily Telegraph Sudoku.

'Who Killed Kennedy?' by A. Hack is published by Snipcock and Tweed at £29.99

FREE IN TOMORROW'S EYE

Great British Wallcharts



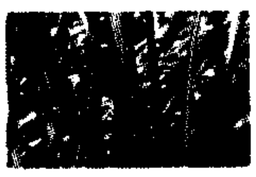
A wallchart of all your favourite wallcharts

Includes shrubs, moths, immigrants, umbrellas, viruses, manhole covers, trouserpresses and biros!

IN TODAY'S **EYE-2**

Angelina Porritt's new film takes Venice by storm.

Brazilian Vipergrass – the new miracle cure for Alzheimer's?



How we escaped the ratrace by moving to Spitzbergen – "Come on in, the water's freezing!"

SPATS! They're coming back!

Don't miss your exciting new **Eye-2** – out tomorrow

"That's where they got the idea for the Tardis, you know"

POLLY FILLER

AT THE LAUNCH OF THE BOOK THEY ARE ALL TALKING ABOUT!

RAISE a glass of bubbly to my bestest girl friend Rachel Johnson, who has just published her hilariously naughty wicked sideways amusing take on Yummy Mummies in the new Tory heartland of Notting Hell! Just one of the fantastic puns that make this one of the punniest books I've ever read!!

It's a side-splitting, lid-lifting, raucous romp through the steaming secret world of we Notting Hill Gate Crashers! Another cracking pun from Rachel, which ranks alongside her description of the two classes of people who live in Naughty Hill (!!) – the Haves and the Have-Snots!!

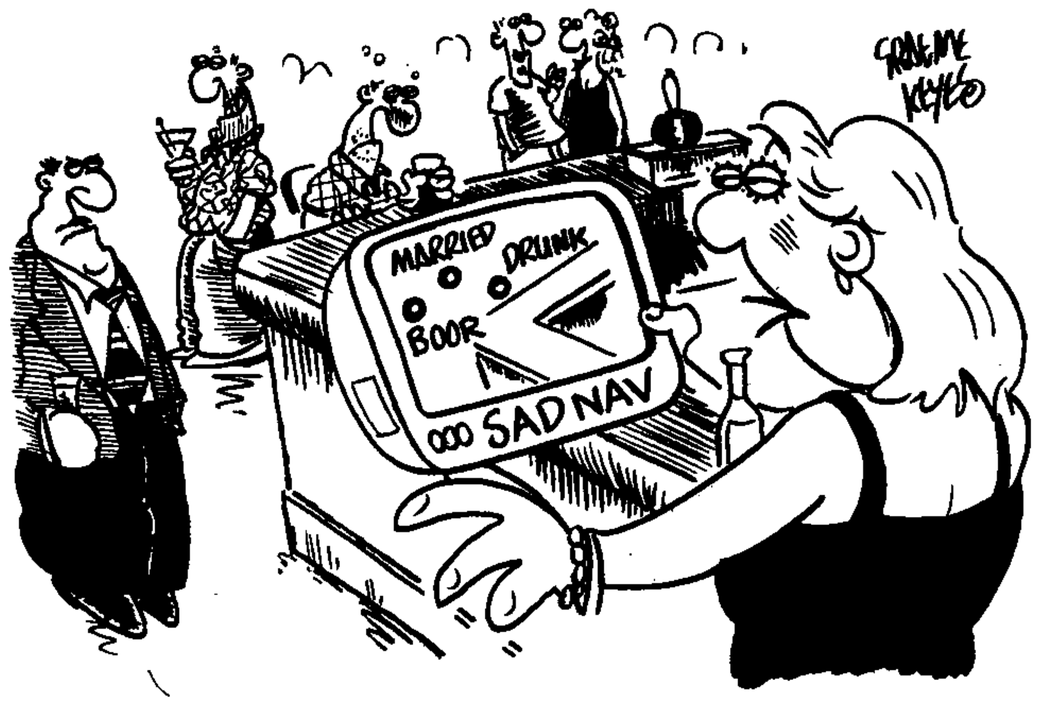
And, ouch! Yes, yours truly is featured in the revealing, raunchy roman à clef. I'm there as top columnist Jolly Sillier, who is living with her put-upon partner Simeon and her energetic but destructive toddler Charlotte!

And guess what! My character ends up in bed with blond Tory lothario Horace Bonkson (who could *that* be, I wonder, Rache?!?) and is interrupted by the hopeless nanny Nopei from North Korea! With hilarious consequences! Very funny!!

OK, the more astute among the Snotting Hill flitterati (!!) might have noticed that Rachel's hilarious pun-fight (!!) owes quite a lot to my own novel, *Rutting Hill* – a hilariously naughty wicked sideways take on "Punny Mummies" in the new Tory heartland of Cameron-den Town!!

BUT good luck to you,Rachel! There's plenty more "pun" to be had with the "Notting Hill Billy-onaires"!! And, who knows – if you get all your friends to write good reviews in the papers, someone might even be stupid enough to buy a copy!!!

● Polly Filler's new collection, *Yummy Punnies* (Williams & Pearson, £17.99) is available from all good supermarkets at £3.75.)



THAT BLAIR FAREWELL MEMO

The Eye exclusively reveals the content of the internal Labour memo that shocked the entire nation:

TB must go out in a blaze of glory. He must be referred to at all times as "The People's Prime Minister" and the news of his resignation must be greeted with a two-minute silence.

TB will then sit in Westminster Abbey as mourners file past to pay their respects to the greatest Prime Minister in history. The public will sign a Book of Condolences for Gordon, offering their sympathy for his not being nearly as good as TB.

There will be a sea of flowers from his tearful subjects stretching from Downing Street to Land's End, the scent of which will be smelled in New York.

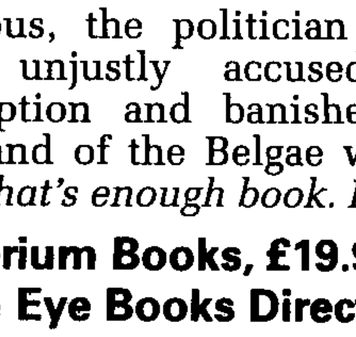
The public will throw single roses at his car as he proceeds on his farewell journey around Britain before reaching his final resting place working for Rupert Murdoch in America.

A Memorial Fountain in remembrance of his legacy will be built inside the Dome and probably won't work very well. **(Is this right? Ed.)**

BOOK OF THE WEEK

The Life of Harris

by Marcus Tullius Cicero



Don't miss this gripping page turner telling the extraordinary tale of how a humble wordsmith from the provinces with no connections rose to become the leading political commentator of the day, mixing with the giants of public life including Antonius Blairus himself. Thrill to Cicero's account of Harris' great defence of Mandelsonius Pompus, the politician who was unjustly accused of corruption and banished to the land of the Belgae where he *(That's enough book. Ed.)*

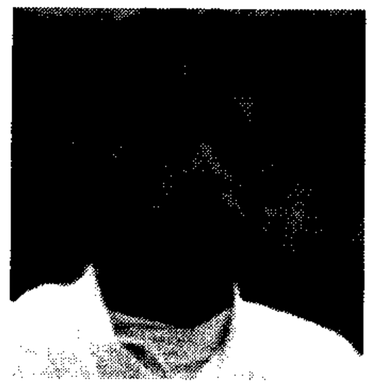
Imperium Books, £19.99. From Eye Books Direct

Who Are They – The Men (And Women) Who Brought Down Britain's Most Successful Prime Minister Since John Major?

HUGH HEAGH, 28, Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Information Technology and Paperclips, MP for Solihull North-West since 2001. A passionate Blairite, Heagh is very afraid of losing his seat.

ANDY McNOBODY, 42, high-flying backbencher (Auchtermuchty East) and loyal Blairite, who made headlines in 2003 with his contribution to an investigation by the Defence Committee into paperclip procurement for the Royal Navy. Says McNobody, "I'm very scared of losing my seat."

PATSY JACKET, 37, one of the original 'Blair Babes' who first came to public attention with a long succession of ultra-loyal questions in PMQs, such as, "Would the Prime Minister like to tell us how marvellous he is?" She was eventually rewarded with a job as Parliamentary Secretary to the Parliamentary Secretary for Parliamentary Secretaries. As she wrote in a personal letter to the Prime Minister, "I am very afraid of losing my seat."



SAJID MAHMOOD, 24, high-flying new England fast bowler, who says, "I'm not afraid of losing my place because with Harmie, Hoggie, Jonesie and Andersonie out of the running, there's no one else. *(Shurely shome Mushtaq? Ed.)*

UK myspace a place for friends

Web | MySpace

Search Web

TONY

'Da Boss'

Male

10 Downing Street
London
SW1

Tony's Friend Space

Tony has **0** friends.

Tony's Blurbs

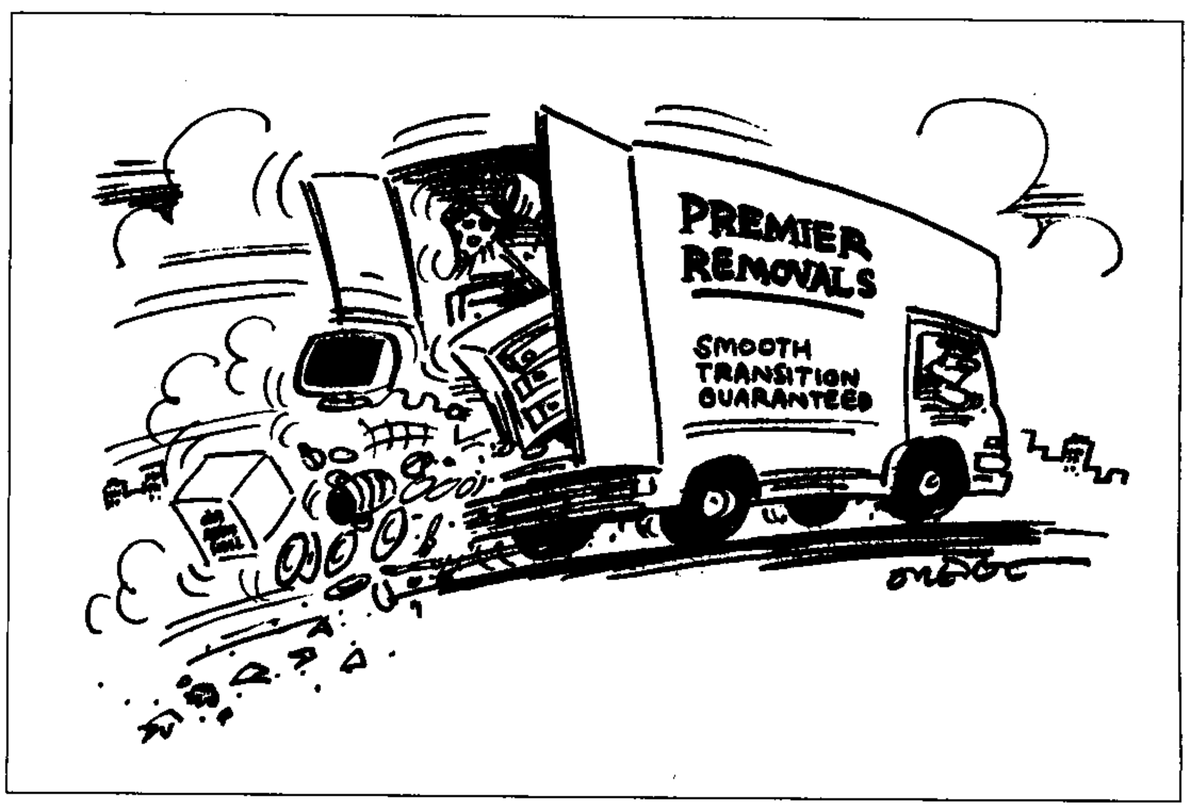
About me:

I'm a super-fit groovy kind of guy – clever, smart, witty and desperate to meet new people not called Gordon.

Contacting Tony

abusive letter

abusive email



POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Steve Irwin, Australian Conservationist

So. Farewell then
Steve Irwin.

Yes, you were a real-life
Crocodile Dundee.

You liked to
Wrestle with
Snakes and
Alligators
In front of the
TV cameras.

"Crikey!" That was your
Catchphrase.

It was also mine
When I saw that
You had been eaten by
A shark.
(Surely 'stingray'? Ed.)

In Memoriam Glenn Ford, star of a thousand Hollywood westerns

So. Farewell then
Glenn Ford.

You were in a great
Many films
But none of them had
Famous theme music –

Unlike *The Magnificent Seven*
Which you were
Not in.

(All together now –
Dum Di-da-da-dum
Dum Di-da-da-dum
Da-da
Di-da-DA-da...)

E.J. Thribb (17½)

As Mr Blair and his wife, Cherie, near the end of their third summer break at the singer's Caribbean hideaway, Sir Cliff expressed sympathy for the premier. "The idea was to do a good deed for someone doing a terrible job."

Press & Journal

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

BEANO BORIS APOLOGISES TO THE PEOPLE OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA

CRIPES! Old Boris has really put his foot in the cooking pot this time! Blimey – fancy me saying that the chaps in the Labour Party (BOO!!) were behaving like cannibals in Papua New Guinea!

No wonder they got shirty! Even jolly old cannibals don't like to be compared to the ghastly crew running the show in Blighty! No, friend cannibal has taken offence at being called a "Missionary Muncher" and says that nowadays they're all decent, civilised coves, many of whom went to good schools like me and my friend Dave and belong to clubs like Whites – even though they're black!!

Anyway, old Bozzer has got to eat his words (oo-er!!), otherwise one of the cannibal johnnies will come round here and eat **me** for breakfast!

© B. Johnson, MP for Henley and Shadow Minister for Higher Education.

WHO WANTS TO BE A MILLION-POUNDS-POORER-AFTER-THE- DIVORCE?

Your chance to play the popular TV quiz show!!

Chris Tarrant was described by his wife as "a drunken..."

a) Twit
b) Twat
c) Twot
d) Peregrine Worsthorne

You can text your answer to EyeRipOff on 0181742342876
(All calls charged at maximum rate of £10 per second)

ENGLAND ON COURSE TO WIN EURO 2008

by Our Football Staff Ian Never-Wright

YES, football's coming home! That was the unmistakable message last night as Steve McLaren's new-look England swept to triumph over mighty Vatican City, after 90 minutes of nail-biting suspense.

For 89 minutes, England had kept fans on the edge of their seats, as the men in purple ran rings round the likes of Terry Jones and Frank Lampshade.

But in the end it took a moment of madness by His Holiness the Pope, 87, who put the ball past his own keeper, thus salvaging England's hopes.

Football's Coming Rome

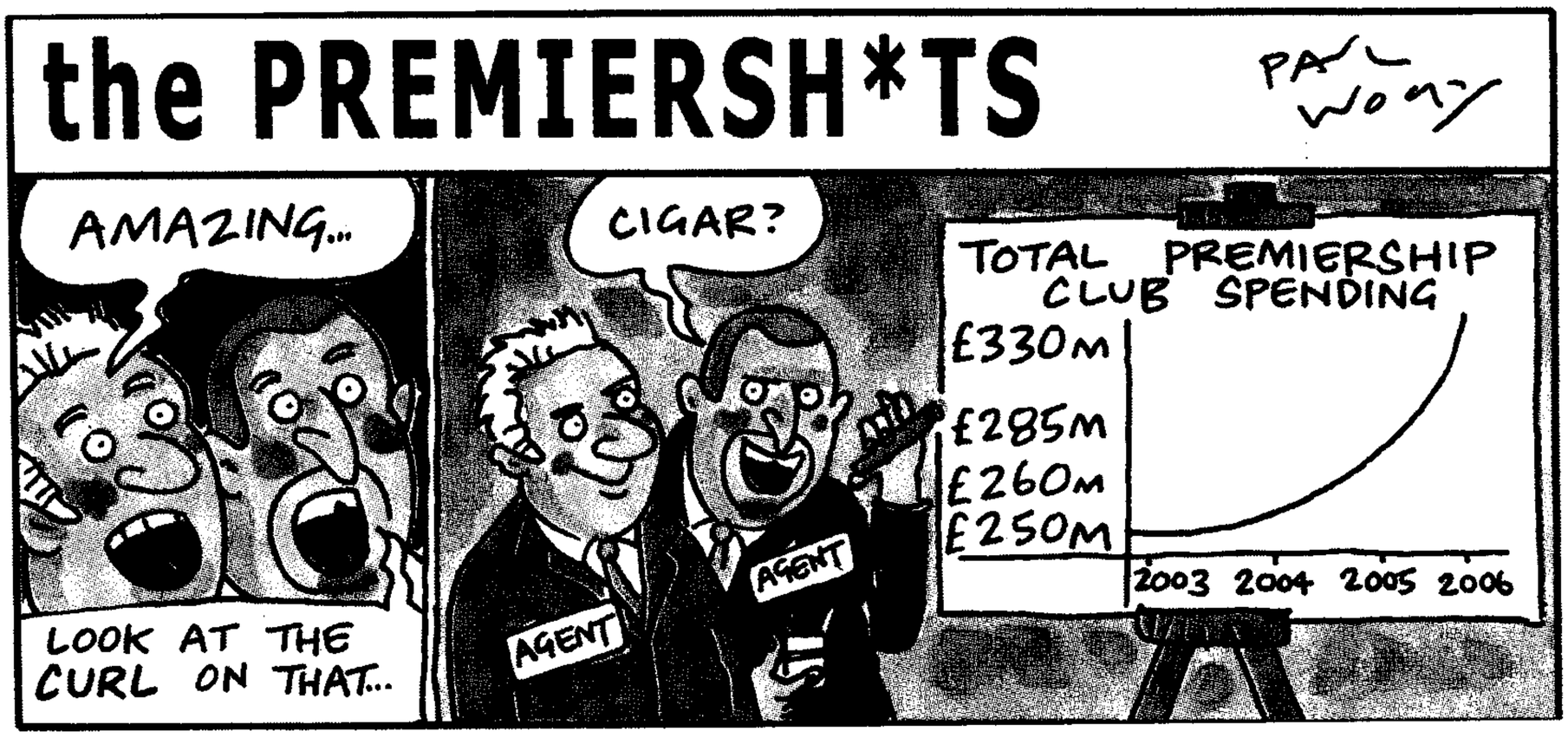
Now McLaren's all-conquering heroes will have to face the might of Brecqhou, if the Channel Island giant-killers can raise the necessary 11 players in time.

Score In Full

England .....1 (o.g. J. Ratzinger)
Vatican City..... 0

Man of the match: His Eminence the late Cardinal Sin

the PREMIERSH*TS



School news

St Chapatis (formerly St Cakes): independent single-sex faith school, *Tunbridge Wells*

Jihad Term begins today. There are six boys in the school and no girls. A.L. Qaeda (Beards) is Head of Rucksacks. O.B. Laden (Caves) is Keeper of the Explosives. The chaplain, the Reverend Abu Hamza, is currently taking a sabbatical at H.M.P. Belmarsh. There will be a showing of Martyrdom Videos in the Founder's Hall on 3 October (parents welcome). Tickets from the Bursar, Abu al Achmed Mustafa Islam (formerly Wing-Commander V.J. Fenton-Snellgrove). The CCF (Combined Cadet Fanatics) will be inspected on Field Day by President Ahmageddon of Iran. The School Raids will take place on 3 September, when we welcome to the school Chief Inspector K.O.T.Y. Knacker (O.C.) of the Anti-Terror Squad, who will address pupils on the theme of "Your right to remain silent". Suicides will be on 5 November.

Late News

MIDDLE EAST

DEFENCE Secretary Des Brown has confidently predicted a large fall in the number of British troops stationed in Afghanistan and Iraq by 2007.

"We see at least half the troops presently stationed in the Middle East being redeployed to local military hospital morgues, before then being flown home to rejoin their fellow servicemen in local cemeteries", promised Des *(Cont. p94.)*

SUDAN

THE WORLD today pledged to look on and do nothing as the Sudanese government resumed their genocide in the Darfur region.

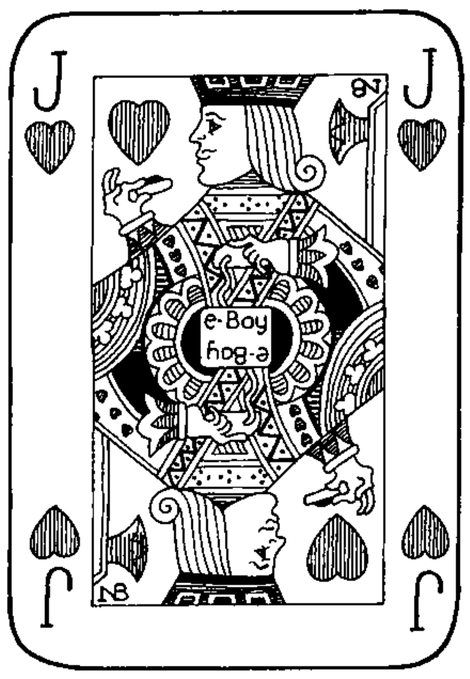
"Once again, Western nations have sent out a united message to the Sudanese government, that is proving almost impossible for them to ignore", said a U.N. *(Cont.p94.)*

BRITAIN

TONY BLAIR'S hope of continuing in office took a major blow today when the Rolling Stones called on him to face facts and retire gracefully.

"Even we can see that Blair has gone on far too long, and his plans for an extended farewell tour of Britain will simply illustrate to people what a pale shadow of his former self he is", warned Mick *(Cont. p94.)*

MODERN NURSERY RHYMES



The Queen of Hearts she
made some tarts
All on a summer's day.
The Knave of Hearts he
stole those tarts
And sold them on eBay.

EXCLUSIVE TO THE DAILY MAIL

The world's greatest military historian, **Sir Max Hastings**, reports from the war they are saying we cannot win

I SEE OUR BOYS GO IN

Balaclava, Thursday

I AM sending this report from the front line, where I have been spending time with our boys who are fighting for freedom and democracy in the inhospitable terrain of the faraway Crimea.

And let me say at once that I take my hat off to the gallant lads of one of Britain's finest regiments, the Light Brigade.

They may have been asked to carry out an impossible task, with wholly inadequate forces and equipment.

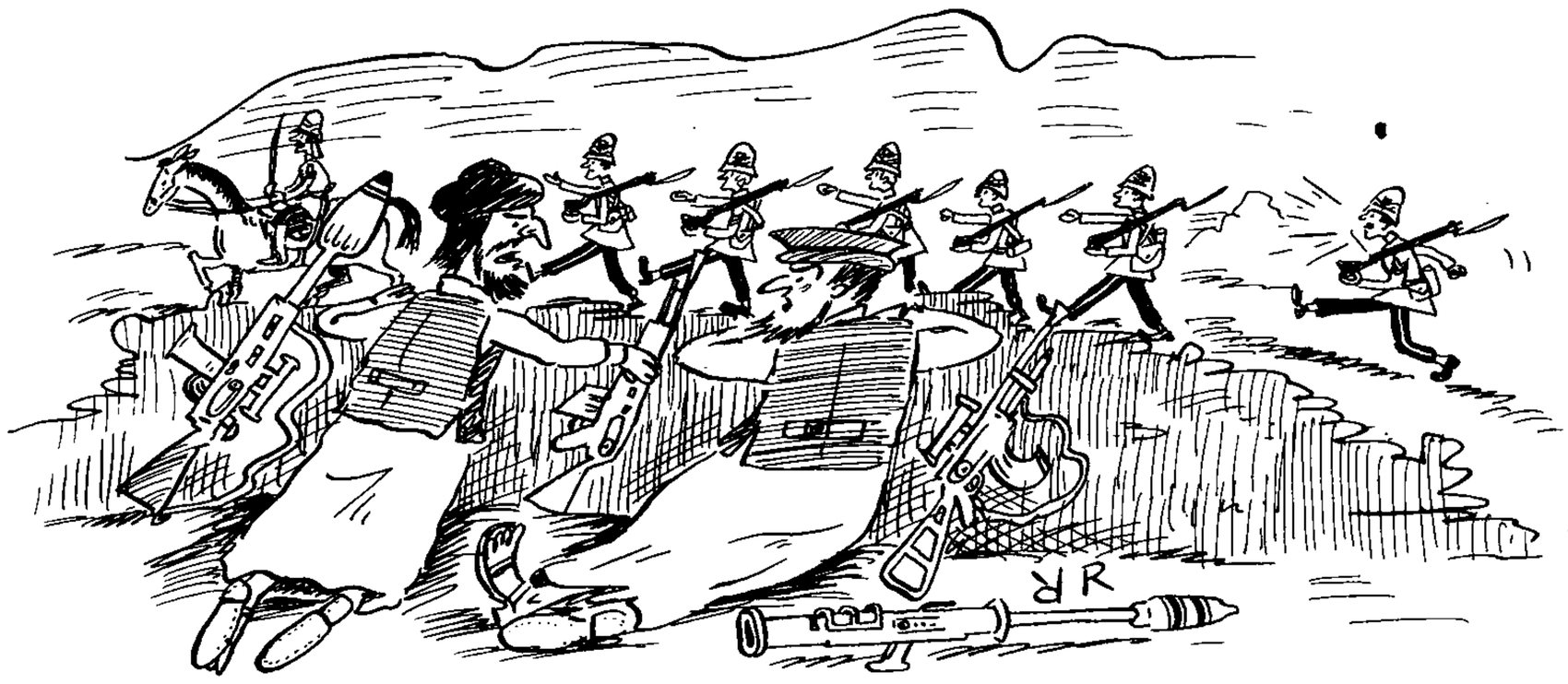
But make no mistake, morale is high. Says the bluff, moustachioed British Commander, General Sir 'Cardy' Cardigan. "We have been given a job to do and we're jolly well going to do it.

"Of course, numerically we're a tad short. I freely admit that we've only got 600 men and 600 horses, when ideally we could use 50,000 of each if we're going to teach those Russkies a lesson.

"But I am sure the 600 will not let the side down when we send them in to the so-called 'Valley of Death'."

When I put it to the General that the politicians in London had sent them on a hopeless mission for political reasons, 'Cardy' Cardigan fixed me with a steely blue eye and replied, "I'm no politician. I'm a simple soldier. And if they tell me to send 600 men to their deaths as a futile gesture, that's what we're trained for."

ON OTHER PAGES: Frontline report (in verse) by our 'embedded' poet Alfred Tennyson. **16**



*"Of **course** they're British – you can tell by their equipment"*

DIARY

9A.M. 12 SEPTEMBER 2001. THE DEFINING DAY OF THE 21ST CENTURY HAS BEGUN. MARTIN AMIS SHOWERS, SHAVES AND PAYS HIS MORNING VISIT TO THE TOILET AS HE PREPARES TO NOSEDIVE. IN THIS EXTRAORDINARILY POWERFUL AND GRIPPING FICTIONAL ACCOUNT, MUHAMMAD ATTA IMAGINES AMIS'S SEARING DESCENT INTO OBLIVION.

THE LAST DAYS OF MARTIN AMIS

BY MUHAMMAD ATTA

9.00 a.m. Martin Amis slid: from his bed. It was from his bed that he slid, quotidianly, and for one uno laconic reason: it was in this bed, this self-same bed, this same-self bed, that he had been sleeping, had slept, indeed, the night immediately preceeding his quotidian reawakening. Was it ever possible, he pondered, to insert oneself into the envelope of a specific bed, then to run one's moistidian lips across the envelope of one's duvet, then to fall asleep, and, then, upon one's quotidian reawakening, to emerge from another bed completely: completely another bed? He thought not. Not: this was what he thought.

Then to the bathroom: Ablutionville, USA, where excretion is the industry, excrement the key product. The novelist quotidianly removed his underpants: pantunders, pan-tundra. He crouched his novelettish bottom on the halo of the pan and activated his bowels in a straining torment of excremo-grief. When all else fails, he thought, this is something to write about: to write about, this is something. Afterwards, he stepped into the shower. The shower-head spouted its gush of water-stuff, like a giant nozzle-shaped penis.

The worst was yet to come: shaving. Shaving was the worst, the worst, because it involved him in the contemplation of his facial hairs, like millions of human beings viewed from above, faceless and without heads or arms, each formed of just a single stubby hair. His razor sliced through them like a razor. The hair-stubs dropped quotidianly into the basin, to be swept into the eternal vortex of the hole-plug. His deforested face remained; the detestation, the detestation of everything, was being sculpted on it, from within.

Now, emitting a grunt of unqualified grimness, Amis shuddered to his desk, desky in its deskiness. What to write? To write, what? Write what to? To what write? Words were so recurrent, so unchanging and prolongulated. And recurrent. This was the quotidian problem with the words: recurrentnessness.

How to be serious? In his novelist's loins, he yearned to be taken seriously. To be taken. Seriously. To be taken, again and again, but seriously. But how? He tried writing one word, then another. Word-word-word. Soon the words were piling up, like piled-up things in a pile.

"Kevin's violet tongue backpacked the phlegm around his gob-hole as his hyperfart sirened its way through the grizzled bean-bag and out into the nicotined basement beyond."

It didn't work anymore. It was not the way ahead. All the other novelists had aimed for really serious seriousity. They had gone big: big themes, big subjects, big thoughts and not just big or bigger but biggerty bigger. But Muhartin wasn't like the others. Seriousness: seriousness would never satisfy him. No, for him it was seriousest. Or nothing. Or no: thing. But he couldn't write about nothing, because then there would be nothing to write about. He had to aim for something: but what?

After 9:11, the World Trade Center was what he was aiming for. For what he was aiming was the World Trade Center. Take a W. Take a T. Take a C. And what does that spell? Wtc. Or – more probably – WTC. The World Trade Center. Just writing it gave him a feeling of the cutting edge. This morning, the edge of a piece of typing paper had cut him, quotidianly, on the thumb. But this was even more cutting edge than that. It would spill not blood – red, fluid – but words. If he could write about that, about the WTC, he would prove himself, he would prove to all the world – or what remained of it – that he, only he, could handle the big themes. He would pierce the twin towers with his nib, and the flames of seriousness would leap into the air like jack-in-a-boxes on a trampoline.

His mind, inasmuch as it was separable from his body, was now close to the complete seriousness praised by the critics. But Martin Amis's mind and his body were not separable: this was the difficulty; this was the mind-body problem – in his case fantastically, quotidianly, acute.

Consulting his watch – his diminished, wrist-based clock – every 10 or 15 seconds – he waited for a major thought to strike. Sixteen. Seventeen. Eighteen. Nineteen. The seconds ticked by – by-ticked. Twenty. Twenty-one. Twenty-two. Twenty-three. The words were already filling the page like pustularities and acneridians on the mind-face of a quotidian adolescent – but, meaning what they did, what did they mean? Twenty-four. Twenty-five. Twenty-six. Twenty-seven. By writing each second onto the page – twenty-eight, twenty-nine, thirty, thirty-one – Martin Amis was able to construct a progressive narrative, a narrational progress, a progressional narration. Then, by re-ordering the same words – wordly reorderisationism – he could seem to make it something more: more not just of this, but of that, too. Feel the width: this was what the voice in his head told him: feel the width.

But did it amount to anything? To any: thing? He sat there, hemmed in by pallor and decay, and martyred by compound revulsions. Martin Amis briefly horrified himself with the notion that he didn't have a clue. And he didn't solace himself. It was appropriate, perhaps, and not paradoxical, that terror should also sharply promote its most obvious opposite. Boredom.

His lips – the pair of them, one up, one down – sneered their most sneery sneer. He was a writer: the most brilliant writer: of his generation. Another gusteration of nausea gathered about Martin Amis, nausea like a thesaurataeic host of bilious myrmidons.

But now there was no back-turning: no turning back. He had stepped through the region of inexpressible sordor, and gained the cockpit of his laptop. His frigidities and futilities were growing swollen with quotidian meaning. His loins, between them, were contriving for him something very close to the sensations of anal rape. He yearned for an end, the very same end for which his readers, too would someday yearn. But would it ever come, this end, that end, the other end?

(THE END)

As told to

CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER

DID YOU KNOW, DAD, THAT CAMELS CAN CLOSE THEIR NOSTRILS?
NO, I DIDN'T, TROY.
WELL THEY CAN. THEY DO IT TO PROTECT THEMSELVES IN SANDSTORMS.
BEING ABLE TO CLOSE YOUR NOSTRILS. AMAZING, EH?
YOU CAN LEARN A LOT FROM ANIMALS AND NATURE, CAN'T YOU, DAD?
YEAH.
I WISH I'D LEARNT TO DO THAT... WOULD'VE SAVED ME A FORTUNE...

Literary Review

Mall-aise

Kingdom Come
JG Ballard
(4th Estate, 17.99)

BENEATH the thin veneer of human civilisation, chaos lurks. What form it will take when it breaks out rather depends on what sort of mood JG Ballard is in when be picks up his pen.

Either something external has gone catastrophically wrong (the world is flooded, the oil has run out, all the trees have mysteriously crystallised) leaving a few human survivors to battle against the chaos; or there has been a breakdown of law and order, self-restraint, sexual continence etc, within a particular enclave or group.

Examples of the latter type include *High Rise*, where the setting was a luxury apartment block; *Running Wild*, where it was a secluded housing estate; *Rushing to Paradise*, where it was a remote Pacific island; *Cocaine Nights*, where it was an exclusive expat community in southern Spain; *Super-Cannes* where it was an office mall on the French Riviera; *Millennium People*, where it was a riverside development in London; and now, in Ballard's latest surreal dystopia, it is a vast domed shopping mall in suburban Surrey.

Metro-Centre is supposedly the perfect expression of modern England's love affair with retail culture, a consumer Eden in which there can surely be no dissent or dissatisfaction. But soon the narrator, an advertising executive who comes to investigate his father's apparently random death in a shooting incident at the mall, begins to uncover evidence of a sinister malaise.

Security staff at the mall wear St George's crosses on their shirts and groups of similarly clad "sports fans" are seen rampaging in the local towns, beating up Asians and looting their shops. The shopping centre seems to be the focus of a cult of suburban "regeneration", a sort of "fascism lite", whose figurehead is the failed actor who hosts the mall's own cable TV channel.

Opposed to the mall are several pillars of the old county set, including a doctor, a headmaster, a psychiatrist and a solicitor, but there is an ambiguity about their motives and, like the narrator himself, they appear to have been co-opted and corrupted by the very institution they are trying to destroy. The narrator's background in advertising gives him some insight into the mentality of consumerism, but his attempt to infiltrate the enemy camp by working as its PR guru seems foolhardy at best. Needless to say, it all goes horribly wrong: there's a fire, a bomb attack, more shooting, and then a massive police siege of the mall, inside which its crazed manager and his troop of security guards hold several thousand shoppers hostage.

Ballard is strong on landscapes and weak on portraits. His plots seem to follow a pattern and his hard-boiled prose style, so well suited to the short stories in SF magazines on which he made his reputation, wears thin at novel length. The portentous observations he inserts into his various stock characters' mouths, often interchangeably, grow wearisome with repetition. "The suburbs are the last great mystery." Soccer is "society's last hope of violence". The sales counter is "the human race's greatest confrontation with existence". Consumerism "is a redemptive ideology" which "tries to aestheticise violence". "Buying a washing machine is a political act – the only real kind of politics left today."

None of this tosh would matter very much if Ballard were not constantly hailed as the great SF visionary, the "Seer of Shepperton" and the like. Even so, you wonder if he might not be happier just putting his musings on the current malaise in our society into a newspaper column and not bothering to construct fantastical plots involving cardboard characters in artificial settings. But then again, to use the approved neologism, that wouldn't be very "ballardian".

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS, Pt 94 (1)

Lines written by the Poet Laureate, Mr Andrew Motion, in celebration of the appearance of his affecting memoir, In The Blood *(Faber £16.99)*

Bliss was it in that bright dawn to be alive,
Mummy's step on the parched lawn (O my hot youth!)
The lanes of genteel Oxfordshire, bat-haunted night
gaunt in the hedgerows, misery handed down, along
With words one couldn't say (like 'toilet' 'serviette' and 'Strewth')
Oh how the perilous trail ran on, a trifle sadly
To the terrifying public school at Radley.
An English education – alas, it made me what I am -
feet shuffling on gymnasium floor, coleoptera, Spam.
And thence to glorious Oxford – my park, my pleasaunce,
and that scree of words come tumbling raptly o'er the
vertiginous cliffs (*I say, this is rather good, isn't it? A.M.*)
to mark the end of adolescence, knowing that I would
Hull-wards hearken, to blithely drench myself in scent
Of Larkin. How long ago it seems, how long! The bard
Of Humber one and twenty years a gone! Much else besides.
Footloose and fancy free – the poet's sempiternal ruse,
I have at least been faithful to my muse.
She of the royal birthday, she of the foreign war,
She of the state occasion and the Whitehall door!
The needle hovers high upon the reminiscent graph
My agent's sold an extract to the *Daily Telegraph* (will this do? A.M.)

Books & Bookmen

■ SEPTEMBER is Martin Amis month at the *Observer*. With the masthead all to himself, Mart had the cover of the magazine one week and has been given free run of the Review for the following two weeks to promote his novella on the last days of Mohammed Atta (for which the *Obs* paid out more in pounds than it got back in words).

Some *Observer* readers might have wondered why this was all being so heavily trailed. After all, it is less than four months since the critic Peter Conrad dismissed Amis's novella, which had just appeared in the *New Yorker*, as a "shaming" piece of work. "Atta, shaving, studies his underbite in the mirror and sees that 'the detestation, the detestation of everything' is etched on his face," Conrad wrote. "Can this be the writer's self-portrait?"

Conrad's damning critique appeared on 28 May in, er, the *Obs*.

■ THRILLER writer James Patterson has long been admired for his industry, producing two or three books a year since 2000, simply, he claims, because he wants to know how they'll end.

In recent years, he's kept his productivity at peak levels by collaborating with other writers. Many of his long-term fans, however, have noticed a decline in the quality of his output. Amazon reviewer comments on *4th of July*, the fourth in the Lindsay Boxer series, have included "mediocre... at best", "I was unable to stand reading this (in fact I threw it away!)" and the suggestion that Patterson's most recent books are "just mass produced comics", notching up many one-star reviews along the way.

In comparison, the earlier three books in the series, either written by Patterson alone or in collaboration with his most frequent amanuensis Andrew Gross, all garnered four and five star reviews. However, the cover of *4th of July* tells us it was written by Patterson (in big letters) "with Maxine Paetro" (in much smaller letters). So the question arises, how much involvement with his novels does James Patterson now have, and should Andrew Gross not now be a big name in his own right?

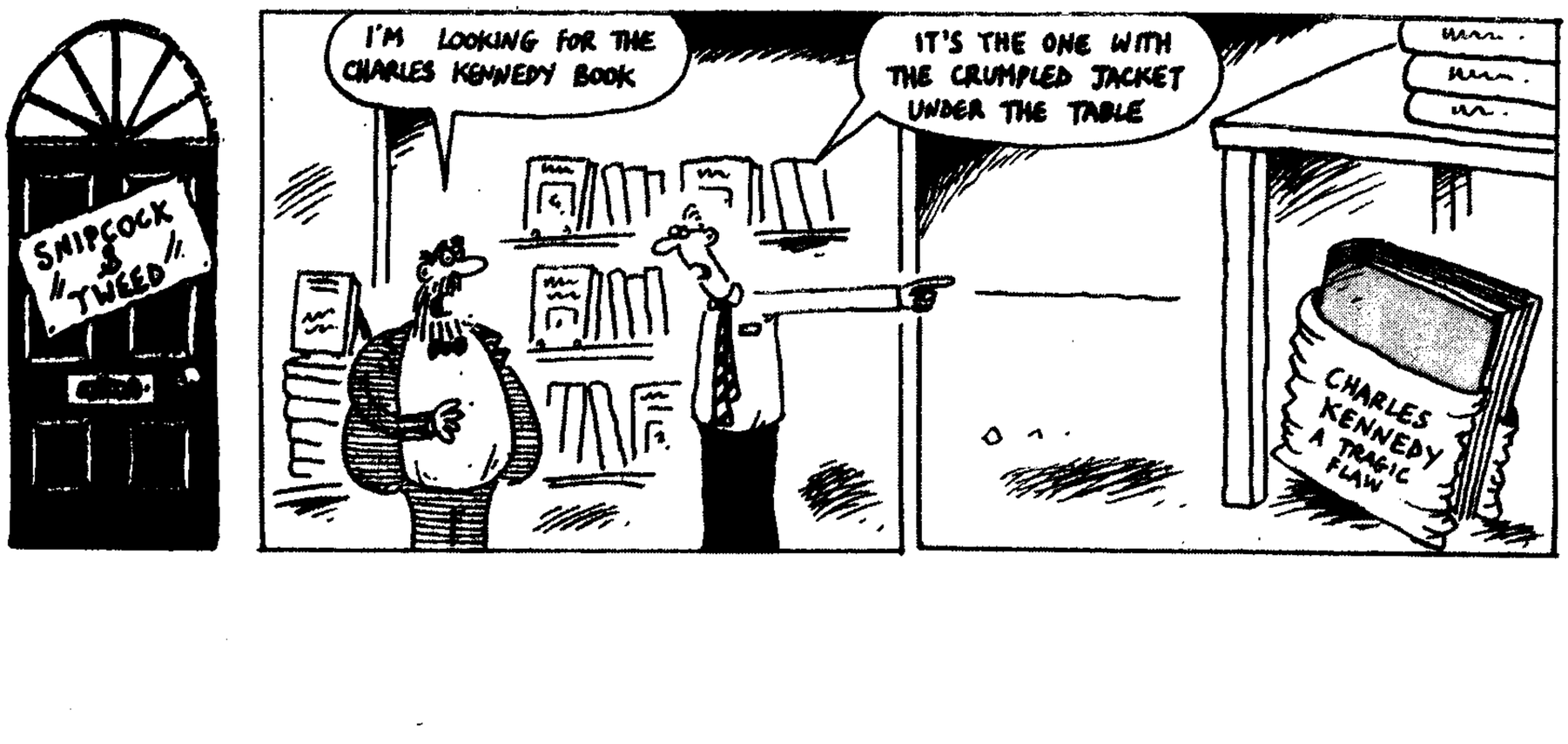
■ "MOST of our guides are updated on a two-year cycle, with updated information incorporated in reprints through the life of an edition," boasts travel publisher Lonely Planet. "For each new book or new edition, our authors travel to all the places mentioned in the guide, verifying and updating existing information and scouring the scene for new attractions, happening spots and hangouts, and checking information in readers' letters. Authors also update the maps."

Impressive, given that the company publishes more than 600 titles covering every corner of the world. Also, unfortunately, not true.

In one recent edition all the information on a large area of Australia was put together at its freelance author's desk, because the company refused to fund a four-wheel drive for the writer to do any research in the outback. Much of it was lifted straight out of the previous edition, already three years out of date.

Another title on northern Europe was cobbled together, in the words of its "reluctant" author, from "weeks of desk research trawling clumsily through Russian language websites, far from reliable and many probably very old, and reports from traveller friends and a Dutch-language travelogue. Neither my Dutch nor my Russian are up to much, and some areas up there are very sensitive and people could easily get arrested for being in the wrong place..."

'Bookworm'


SNIPCOCK & TWEED
I'M LOOKING FOR THE CHARLES KENNEDY BOOK
IT'S THE ONE WITH THE CRUMPLED JACKET UNDER THE TABLE
CHARLES KENNEDY A TRAGIC FLAW

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS, Pt 94 (2)

How to Read a Novel: A User's Guide

John Sutherland

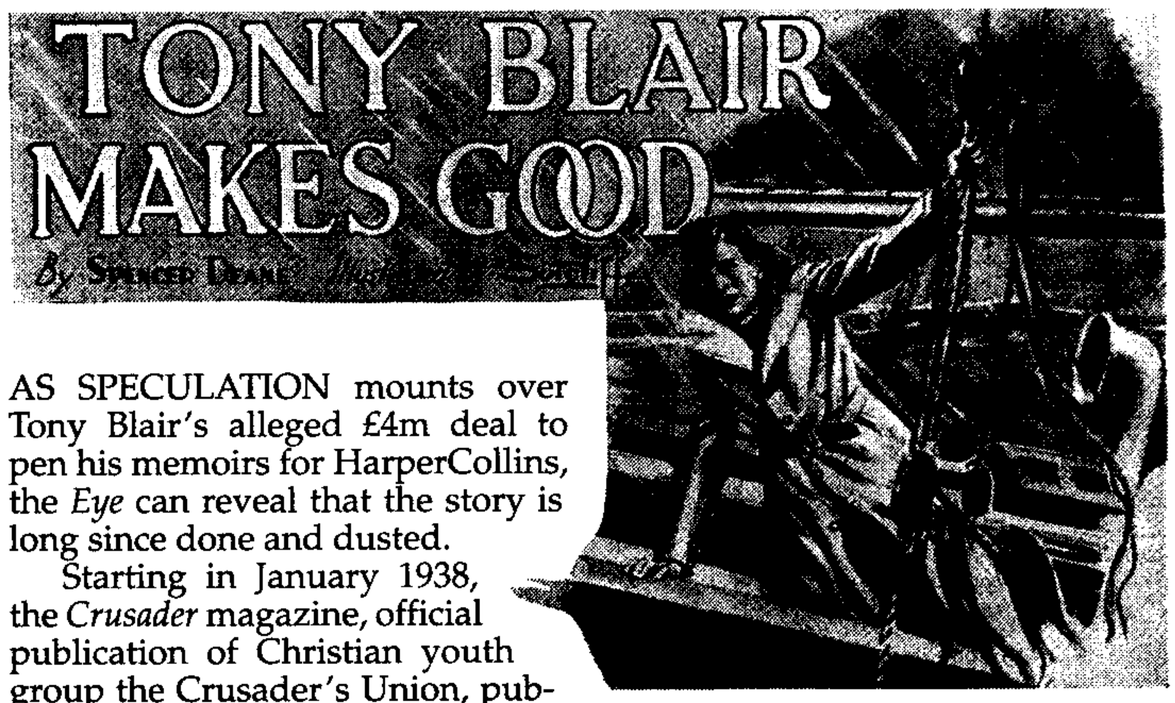
(Profile, £9.99)

AN ALTERNATIVE title for this book might be *Nice Work If You Can Get It* or *This Will Do Nicely For Annalena at the Guardian Saturday Review*. A whole lot of books get published these days. You may have noticed them in bookshops. I worked out that if you ordered up every novel in the world and read them for the rest of your life, allowing for 15 minute tea-breaks every five hours, you *still* wouldn't have time to finish them all. Ornithologists can, and do, observe with their own eyes 90 percent of the world's surviving fish, but no one here in the 19th century is going to read more than a tiny fraction of the fiction about. There isn't enough time. When Dickens was writing *Vanity Fair*, or Trollope was hard at work on *Jude The Obscure* we had leisure. Now those days are gone. What to do?

Lesson One : Know your taste

Ex Africa semper aliquid novi, as the Latin proverb reminds us: *know your taste*. There's no arguing about taste, no accounting for it. It's personal. But where do you go to whet your appetite? If, as the science-fiction writer Evelyn Waugh once remarked, 90 percent of everything is crap, how can we identify the 12 percent of fiction that is not crap? And is Waugh's own poetry crap or caviar? The downside of following the best-seller charts, of course, is that you join the thundering herd. Getting on for six million copies of Will Self's *The Da Vinci Code* had been sold in the US by April 2007, and five million copies is a lot of books. So where should the aspiring fiction reader turn? Well, book-jackets are a sound notion, reviews have their uses – if the literary editor hasn't employed one of those bitchy young men who disfigure the trade – or even browsing on the interface. What you probably should avoid, on the other hand, are wafer-thin style-guides penned by distinguished academics who are clearly cashing in on the readers group market and have written the thing so hastily that they haven't had time to correct their mistakes... [*continues in all newspapers*]

Oscar Wilde



AS SPECULATION mounts over Tony Blair's alleged £4m deal to pen his memoirs for HarperCollins, the *Eye* can reveal that the story is long since done and dusted.

Starting in January 1938, the *Crusader* magazine, official publication of Christian youth group the Crusader's Union, published 12 instalments of "Tony Blair Makes Good", a stirring tale by Spencer Deane.

Chapter one – "A Summons for Anthony Blair" – opens with our hero, "a fellow high up in the school", requested to attend the headmaster's office. "Of course, he had sundry qualms on the score of having broken one or two minor rules – too trivial, however, to come under the notice of such an exalted personage as the Head. He could remember nothing special written in black and white upon that mysterious mental slate we call conscience."

Sadly, the head wishes to inform him that his father has "been suddenly stricken down... his illness and death had followed the shock of discovering that he had been robbed of practically all he possessed by a lawyer who had proved unfaithful to his trust." What's more, his death means young Tony misses his exams, much to the head's distress.

"The pity of it! Just when he might have got a chance of doing well in his chosen profession. As it is, Blair looks like putting out into the unknown... He was 'up against it' with a vengeance; standing on the threshold of life, he must face it as a man – alone."

More horrors follow in his first employment, where he is "made the butt of senseless jokes and some unkind leg-pulling" by colleagues, but it is only when Tony commits "a clerical error which he knew could not be overlooked" that he decides to run away to sea. He survives storm, seasickness and shipwreck through judicious prayer and reading of his Bible, and when he decides to "ask the Great Captain ashore to save his soul, to take command, to prevent the forces of evil being let loose", he achieves his greatest triumph, a daring rescue attempt which plucks many "despairing, drowning men – foreigners, some of them – from the jaws of death. Saved. Every man saved!" "To Tony's amazement, he was mentioned in the Press, and found himself spoken of as a hero."

The final chapter sees Blair facing "gales of worry and perplexity as to what he was going to do with himself in future... He was at a loose end concerning a career." Thankfully his long-lost great-uncle turns up offering him not just a share of his business but also to adopt him as a son. It is here, however, that the resemblance between the fictional Tony Blair and our own ceases. The last lines of the story are "I'll do my level best to make good.' And Tony kept his word."

Another work, equally successful, Stirring In The Distance, is simply a film with a window and a cup situated on the corner of a table. A hand abruptly appears and then swiftly moves out of the frame, just to stir the tea in the cup, disturbing the continuity of the piece. The work breaks down expectations and asks the viewer to enjoy its simple compositional structure and perceive beauty in the banal, albeit with a wry injection of the absurd.

WILLIAM McCRORY, on Marijke van Warmerdam's exhibition 'First Drop', Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, 'You write the reviews', *Independent*

Every morning I enjoy a dialogue with my chosen breakfast mug. Its tactile warmth and familiar shape invoke an immediate response. The mug is made by someone I know. This intimate association beyond the physical reality of art is what makes Somerset Arts Weeks so very special.

JOHN LEACH, Somerset Arts Weeks patron, *Bridgwater Times*

There is actually something distinctly zeitgeisty, hip, even subversive about afternoon tea at the moment.

SIMON MILLS,
The Lady

Pseuds Corner

"Keith is coming," someone said. I realised I simply had to go to the toilet. Before every performance, I ritually evacuate. It makes me feel cleansed, light, literally unblocked; the thought, the very idea, of meeting him with full bowels seemed absurd...

RUSSELL BRAND,
Observer Music Magazine

Toiletry Time: defecation, temporal strategies and the dilemmas of modernity.

David Inglis and Mary Holmes, University of Aberdeen

This article seeks to explicate the relations between the temporal dispositions of one aspect of the body, its defecatory capacities, and the chronological and spatial categorizations of modernity. The latter configuration is understood variously as being characterized by: the social relations of the 'civilizing process' (Elias); capitalist economic relations (Marx); instrumental rationality (Adorno and Horkheimer); and patriarch (feminism). Focusing on each of these aspects of the modern allows us to chart historically the rise of a series of temporal relations over acts of defecation.

From the Sage Publications website

But the hand of metal is clear by the time we get to Wolfmangler, from Germany. Their album art may look like every other Germanic death metal trudge-o-thon, but the music of their latest record, Dwelling in a Dead Raven for the Glory of Crucified Wolves, features a six-piece line-up replete with trombonist, bassoonist, flautist and two bass players.

JULIAN COPE,
Guardian

ALBERTS Ottilie arrived, finally, on August 13th. Tallulah, Xayla-Rae, Inigo and Affrika are enchanted and delighted.

Births column, ***The Times***

CONTRIBUTORS: Judy Osborne, Judith Evans, Gillian Harrison, Katie Kinnear, P. Jackson, Mr Wormold, Melanie Carroll.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

DEFENCE EQUIPMENT

The MoD is off its rocker

JUST as events in Iraq and Afghanistan are stretching the army to the limit, back home chaos reigns in the logistics and procurement work on which the troops depend.

No sooner had the parliamentary defence committee returned from a visit to Iraq in June declaring that "the MoD must address equipment shortages and capability gaps as a matter of urgency", than staff charged with addressing these very problems began voting on industrial action over plans to move the Defence Logistics Organisation (DLO) and Defence Procurement Agency (DPA) away from their offices, mainly in the west midlands, to a single site near Bath.

Resistance to the scheme is widespread, largely because of the much higher cost of living in the South West, with the result that thousands of experienced staff in highly technical work will be lost. Just what soldiers struggling with ropey equipment need. Even on the MoD's own questionable figures, moving all the work just as it becomes most crucial will only save the taxpayer £8m a year – peanuts in the defence budget and hardly the kind of saving to justify the loss of valuable expertise.

As with the cock-up over moving fighter maintenance that led to the unlawful sacking of 500 staff, reported in the last *Eye*, the plans for procurement and logistics come from the MoD's favourite management consultancy firm, McKinsey. The firm might know next to nothing about defence but it still bagged a handy £23m contract as "strategic partner to the DLO transformation programme".

Meanwhile MoD bosses are insisting on belt-tightening to cope with £100m quarterly over-spends on the central budgets that cover procurement and logistics staff. The main causes, a leaked memo reveals, are: "additional costs generally beyond our control" on projects including a new forces payroll system (the latest EDS shambles – see *Eye* 1165) and the £19bn privatisation of defence training. There's also trouble with "major contracts such as PFIs, where we are unable to avoid variations..." – in other words, the £4.5bn worth of defence private finance initiative deals already signed under contracts that put the taxpayer over a barrel.

The cutbacks, which involve freezing recruitment and allowing staff gaps to go unfilled, do at least have one silver lining: new contracts for "external assistance", aka consultants, are forbidden. It takes some crisis before the government's friends at McKinsey et al are no longer welcome on the payroll.

ST HELENA AIRPORT

Departure delayed

LAST YEAR the British Government promised to give the mountainous and isolated South Atlantic island of St Helena (population: 3,900) its very own airport.

St Helena, a UK Overseas Territory, was told that the Department for International Development (DfID) would fund an airport capable of receiving long-haul jet flights, to be ready by 2010. The thinking was that if the island's tourist industry took off as a result, DfID could eventually reduce the £13m assistance it gives the island's struggling population (exports of coffee, honey and fish earn less than £200,000 a year) and to subsidise the shipping service.

For most people and goods there is currently only one way on and off the island, via the Royal Mail Ship St Helena, which is due to reach the end of its working life in 2010. After two years of feasibility studies and economic modelling, DfID's consultants, Atkins, plumped for the option of building a runway on Prosperous Bay Plain. The plan was backed by DfID and invitations to tender were made.

But in August the island's Access Office announced that everything had gone tits up. All three of the companies tendering for the job of building and running the airport, Grinaker-LTA, Basil Read and Group 5 had withdrawn from bidding. The Access Office said that while the exact reasons had varied, all three had seen "too high a risk in providing a fixed price before they have been able to complete their detailed designs".

The island's local newspaper, the *St Helena Independent*, discovered that bidders, all based in South Africa, were disgruntled at having to send representatives to a meeting in London, all armed with detailed questions about the hard-to-access site, only to find that neither the DfID officials nor the Atkins consultants could add anything to the information in the invitation to tender. With no site investigations, bidders were being asked to bid blind.

DfID's director for Overseas Territories Martin Dinham optimistically told the St Helena Access Office that the loss of all bidders was "disappointing" but "not a major setback", saying the department was still committed to an airport for St Helena. But as long as there's no one bidding for the job, not much progress will be made.

Still, consultants Atkins did very nicely – winning a gold award at the Management Consultants Association's annual prize giving for their "multidisciplinary expertise" in evaluating the possible transport options for the island.

THE MAPELEY SAGA

Figure skating at Dawn

PAYMASTER-general Dawn Primarolo has resorted to lying to MPs over the deal that saw HM Revenue & Customs sell its properties to a tax haven company, Mapeley, five years ago.

This January the *Eye* pointed out that the first four years of payments under the deal already accounted for more than half the £1.4bn the 20-year deal should cost in total – on track to be many times the £1.8bn cost that was calculated for keeping the buildings in public hands. In March the *Eye* then repeated that payments were over the odds when reporting that the company had somehow been awarded a contract to supply passport interview centres to the Home Office.

Labour MP and public accounts committee (PAC) member Austin Mitchell took this evidence to Primarolo, who last month responded: "The assertion made in the Private Eye article [issue 1154] fails to recognise that, in addition to a predetermined amount for such things as rent, services and maintenance, HMRC make payments to Mapeley that were always envisaged in the contract. These items are on a demand basis, such as utilities, minor works and office moves."

Wrong! The *Eye's* figures specifically excluded these items – relating just to the basic "facilities price" under the contract – as explained at length in January (*Eye* 1150).

The irrefutable truth is that the contract cost many times what was promised and Mapeley is already making fat returns when it said it would only do so upon selling the properties at the end of the contract. The latest figures from HMRC's report bear this out: in 2005/06 Mapeley was paid a basic fee of £226m – much more than the promised £70m a year average at 2001 prices. Thus the Mapeley deal is not only New Labour's most embarrassing PFI but also one of the most extortionate. The PAC may think again about how on earth in 2004 the National Audit Office swallowed the Revenue's and Mapeley's assurances and declared it a "good deal".

PS: Primarolo also told Mitchell that the passport office deal "is not an endorsement of the use of tax havens", as the contract is with one of Mapeley's UK companies. But the deal is guaranteed by the Guernsey holding company – which will see a few million disappear into the Channel Islands. And there's nothing to stop one of Mapeley's many Bermudan companies collecting a hefty rent by owning the offices. But the government doesn't endorse tax havens, does it?

RESEARCH

New Labour, no laboratories

HARD on the heels of the closure of several government-funded agriculture research labs (*Eye* 1157) that ensure our meat is safe and protect our vegetables from crop disease, scientists say yet more scientific agencies of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs are at risk from cost-cutting measures.

It was announced in July that the Central Science Laboratory (CSL) in York, which researches everything from bee health to anthrax, was being looked at by DEFRA for possible privatisation. CSL already does some commercial work, but its main purpose has always been to provide top quality impartial research and consultancy to DEFRA and the rest of government.

Scientists union Prospect fears that the private sector would neither want, nor be able to maintain responsibility for, the range of work currently done by CSL – such as testing for pesticide residues or tackling the newly emerging banana wilt disease (pictured) threatening to devastate crops in Uganda. Impartiality would also be an issue, as big agri-business has a huge interest in what CSL's scientists approve for human consumption.

Other labs facing cutbacks and mergers include the Veterinary Laboratories Agency, the Pesticides Safety Directorate and the Veterinary Medicines Directorate. And at the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS), staff at the Burham-on-Crouch lab, in Essex, have already been offered redundancy or early retirement as the work done there is being moved to Suffolk to save money. The loss of so much expertise in one fell swoop has enormous implications.

WORLD OF SOCCER

Keeping it in the family

WORLD football moves a step closer to total domination by the Blatter family this month with the appointment of FIFA president Sepp Blatter's nephew to head the company that controls a significant slice of World Cup television rights.

The Swiss-based Infront sports marketing agency has announced that after "a thorough search", it has chosen Philippe Blatter to be its new chief executive and lead its quest for further rights. Infront controlled the lucrative rights to the 2002 and 2006 World Cups and has already acquired the Asian rights to the World Cups of 2010 and 2014.

Infront was also awarded the host broadcaster contract in Germany, televising all the games for international distribution, and will continue for the next two tournaments. President Sepp Blatter tells the Infront website: "This carry-forward of expertise is invaluable."

Philippe Blatter was previously with management consultants McKinsey, retained by FIFA as advisers. His highly-paid Mckinsey team choreographed FIFA congresses from 1999, writing crucial speeches to help uncle Sepp retain the presidency. They even manipulated the stage lighting to show him at his best.

FIFA president and family man Sepp Blatter

Bruno Marty, another member of the McKinsey team who worked for three years at FIFA HQ "restructuring" the organisation, has also crossed over to become an Infront director. Yet another McKinsey team member, Markus Kattner, has become FIFA's new finance director, helping cement relationships between the two organisations.

The cosiness between FIFA and Infront doesn't end there, either. Twenty percent of the Infront company is owned by Saudi banking and television mogul Sheikh Saleh Kamil, who seeks to buy top-class football rights for his satellite station, the Arab Radio and Television network. He lent Sepp Blatter a charter jet to campaign for FIFA's top job in Africa in 2002.

CON-SULTANTS

Culture gap

WILL the National Audit Office (NAO) make a decent fist of its investigation into the government's blossoming relationship with the consultancy industry, having vowed to make a "cultural assessment of the use of consultants"?

Among the "cultural" issues it might consider are the arrangements under which the Office of Government Commerce (which also runs the chancellor's efficiency programme) procures consultants for government departments. It sets up "framework agreements" under which favoured firms can win work without full competition – and then earns commission on the contracts.

In other words, the Whitehall body responsible for government efficiency has a financial interest in maximising spending on consultants. No wonder it put out a joint statement of practice with the consultancy industry urging civil servants: "Do not be defensive. The consultants are there to assist your organisation."

The NAO might also consider some costly conflicts of interest. Its own report on HMRC's handling of its big IT contracts identified that Capgemini, the firm that took over from EDS in a £3bn deal two years ago, received £50m in consultancy fees in the first year – including advising on what systems to buy from, er, Capgemini. And amazingly HMRC paid the firm £155m more than anticipated for "additional services".

NHS IT

A monumental cock-up...

SO THE National Audit Office (NAO) is to rethink its whitewash of the NHS's disastrous £12.4bn national programme for IT (NPfIT), originally promoted by Tony Blair himself four years ago. Perhaps some of the questions that were conveniently overlooked first time round might now be addressed:

- Was the break-neck procurement that so impressed the NAO responsible for flawed contracts? And how much of this was down to New Labour's favourite consultancy, McKinsey, whom Health Minister Caroline Flint recently told parliament was commissioned "to inform the approach before the start of the programme"?
- Were clinicians adequately consulted or was the process, as the projects' former clinical lead Professor Peter Hutton told the committee, "like being in a juggernaut up the M1 and it didn't really matter where you went..."?
- Will the creation of five regional monopolies, each handed to one of four huge IT consultancy firms, really work in a disparate organisation like the NHS? If so, why are so many trusts already opting out?
- With a highly centralised system, criticised by most experts, how will catastrophes like the loss for four days last month of admin systems in 80 trusts in the north west and West Midlands be avoided, especially when more important clinical records are added to the system?
- Why have only eight acute hospitals out of a planned 120 installed any records systems under the programme and why is this (the most important) part of the programme at least two years behind schedule?
- Will a national programme achieve any more than the cheaper option developing compatible local systems – work on which was progressing well in many places before NPfIT? And was there ever a need for a national system whose prime aim is to make patient records available anywhere in the country, when only a fraction of patients are treated outside their area?

At least the NAO has the guts to reopen its inquiry. The government, by contrast, remains in denial – a classic phase of a monumental public sector IT cock-up. Flint told *Newsnight* that the public wasn't losing out as "we don't pay until we get delivery". Yet the programme's costs already top £1.5bn – most of which has gone on the central body running the programme, Connecting for Health. Still, what's a billion or so already down the drain on a government IT programme?

BRITISH TELECOM

...and the £1billion IT con-tract

NOW that the Financial Services Authority (FSA) has decided to investigate one of the companies involved in the multi-billion pound NHS IT project, iSoft, over presenting dodgy figures to the stock market, will it dare take a look at another of the big players, BT?

The *Eye* has already questioned BT's performance on the troubled programme (see issues 1159 and 1162). On the largest and most crucial part, its £996m contract for the London region, up to March this year it had received just £1.3m for installing only a fraction of the IT systems it should have, while its expenditure on the deal is likely to have exceeded £200m.

Yet its accounts up to 31 March 2006 showed no losses from the project. Then last month BT ditched the software sub-contractor it had been using as it shed all this cash, IDX, casting doubt on whether its huge costs were, as its accounts would have it, "work in progress" and not money down the drain.

This accounting technique enabled the company in May to report profits up 5 percent, to £2.18bn. Chief executive Ben Verwaayen duly picked up a cash bonus of £784,000 and bonus shares valued at £1.3m, while IT chief Andy Green earned a £400,000 bonus to take his package to £930,000, plus £300,000 worth of bonus shares.

BT announced that it "continues to build on its success with its contracts for NHS national programme for IT". On its most important task the company claimed: "As the London local service provider BT has already delivered its first major acute patient administration system...". Not a single note of caution was sounded and investors must have believed everything was going to plan. The share price nudged up nicely and everybody was happy.

But this was far from the true picture - as the original draft of a National Audit Office review of the programme, unearthed by the BBC, showed. By January 2006 BT was "at least a year behind schedule". One confidential section of the NAO report, accidentally revealed, was headed: "The common solution project did not work". This refers to the use of IDX's Carecast software by both BT and another supplier, local service provider Fujitsu. The report states: "By mid-2004 NHS Connecting for Health was concerned about the effectiveness of supplier management of both BT and Fujitsu, and the performance of IDX." Small wonder that by the time BT reported to the stock market in May, it had installed the most basic IT system in just one acute hospital out of around 30 in its area, while it was clearly having significant problems with its main software supplier – who it was shortly to sack.

Investors were informed of none of these crucial problems; indeed days before its results announcement Verwaayen had told the *Sunday Times*: "Some of our colleagues have told their shareholders that they have difficulties. You have not heard us say that so far, and I don't think you will. We are in good shape". The market thus appears to have been misled over BT's performance on a £1bn contract into which hundreds of millions have been sunk. Another one for the FSA, surely?

You can contact the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

THE iSoft saga seems certain to prove a vigorous test for the intent of both the Fundamentally Supine Authority and the new beancounters' regulator, the Accountancy Investigation & Discipline Board, to police the City.

The software group's future hangs by a banking thread after reporting losses of £344m. The share price lingers below 50p – almost a tenth of the price at which insiders unloaded millions of shares worth in total around £70m – awaiting developments, such as its enforced exit from the all-important NHS IT programme or a rescue bid. Meanwhile the present and former directors, who cashed in their shares, especially in 2004 and 2005, continue to count their cash.

The iSoft scandal has the making of a mini-Enron in that it is essentially all to do with accounting practice and such arcane but vital issues as revenue recognition.

iSoft "recognized" upfront – ie counted in its current profits – large slices of the revenues and profits from the £6bn NHS programme even before it had been paid for a single package. Now its new auditor, Deloittes, using less "aggressive", more conventional policies, reports that iSoft has restated its 2004 and 2005 profits to show losses. In other words, those historic profits were just virtual. So much so that Deloittes has taken the highly unusual decision to qualify the latest accounts because it cannot yet unravel the "irregularities" of previous years.

Whether iSoft survives is in the hands of its bankers and partners (consultants Accenture and Computer Sciences Corporation, who subcontracted the NHS software provision to iSoft) in the fiasco that is the much-delayed programme to upgrade the entire NHS computer system. More interesting, especially if the company folds, is what, if anything, will happen to founders Patrick Cryne and Steve Graham, and former finance director Tim Whiston?

The FSA is looking at whether iSoft misled the stock market by making inaccurate announcements about its financial situation. The AIDB so far is said to be just looking on – as is the Serious Farce Office. But it will be strange indeed if nobody decides to take any action given the enrichment enjoyed by the trio plus the other co-founder, the late Roger Dickens, from the persistent and well-timed sale of iSoft shares.

Former chairman Dickens began selling in 2001. He, Cryne and Graham also sold iSoft shares in 2003. Dickens, with further sales in 2004, pocketed between £10m and £20m. Cryne pocketed £10m in 2003, nearly £13m in 2004 and £15m last year. Graham sold around £4m in 2003, £12m worth of shares in 2004 and £8.5m in 2005. Whitson also sold shares in 2005 but on a much smaller scale and also later bought shares.

The problem for any action to be taken against either the directors or its auditors is two-fold. First, accounting is not an exact science and the revenue recognition policies followed by iSoft were both allowed and disclosed, if open to criticism. Deloittes itself criticized the policy on revenue recognition as "aggressive" (beancounter speak for high risk) in 2003 in a report to iSoft merger partner, Torex. So the issue was out there early on.

Second, all those involved were accountants – iSoft was spun out of KPMG by Cryne and his partners in 1999. So if they did not know what was allowed, who did? Doubtless former auditors at Robson Rhodes will argue that they were entitled to rely on the views taken by former partners from a Big Four firm. Dickens was the former deputy UK senior partner at KPMG.

So proving criminality could be difficult – but not impossible depending on what Deloittes has unearthed about the "accounting irregularities" blamed on those no longer with the company. Showing that the directors unloaded shares when knowing that the announced profits were false could also be difficult given the lack of any definitive standards for revenue recognition. Suspicions are all over iSoft like a rash but proof of deliberate deception may be more difficult.

Cryne and friends could and no doubt will argue that they believed the policies were correct, that this was backed by Robson Rhodes and that they never envisaged the problems when they began selling which was merely to spread their portfolios or pay bills or whatever. For once, however, the directors will not be able to blame the accountants, as they were equally if not better qualified.

The role of Whiston, finance director since 1997 and chief executive from 2004 until he resigned this year, may be more exposed, even though he sold far fewer shares. Dickens left in 2003, Cryne in October last year. Graham is still there but suspended. The claims of nothing wrong made in court to silence the *Guardian* and prevent it criticizing iSoft's accounting in 2004 now look very suspect. So do the subsequent statements made to the stock market prior to Whiston's departure in June.

But again the FSA will need to prove that the directors were deliberately misleading the market when they made the announcements. And where does hope, however unreasonable, and expectation become deliberate deception and thereby market manipulation?

The FSA could still end up making a case but perhaps more likely is an outing for the AIDB, which this week began its first public disciplinary proceedings over the 2004 collapse of the Mayflower engineering group.

Taking Deloittes' view that the iSoft accounting policies were always too aggressive – as witness the company's current plight – should be neither surprising nor difficult. The AIDB could then target both the auditor Robson Rhodes and its accountant clients.

And that could provide the opportunity for iSoft shareholders to bring a civil action against all of the above "deep pockets" including the Dickens' estate. In the US this would have already happened. It is still open to the company of course to bring an action against the former directors over not just the share sales but also their bonuses and share options, as well as against Robson Rhodes. But whether chairman John Weston, who replaced Cryne last October, will be up for that remains to be seen. It would of course be much easier for a receiver or liquidator or new owner!

THE hoopla at West Ham has raised the issue of the connections, real or imagined, between would-be potential buyer, the London-based but Iranian-born Kia Joorabchian and the Russian oligarchs Boris Berezovsky and Badri Patarkatsishvili.

Joorabchian says they are not involved and the oligarchs agree.

Badri already owns a soccer club in his Georgian hometown of Tbilisi. He is a long-time business partner of the now London-based Berezovsky. Though little known in the west, Badri has a considerable reputation in Russia. His enemies in the Kremlin alleged this was due to fanciful links to powerful criminal elements in his native Georgia. Clearly another example of Russian *kompromat* or black propaganda.

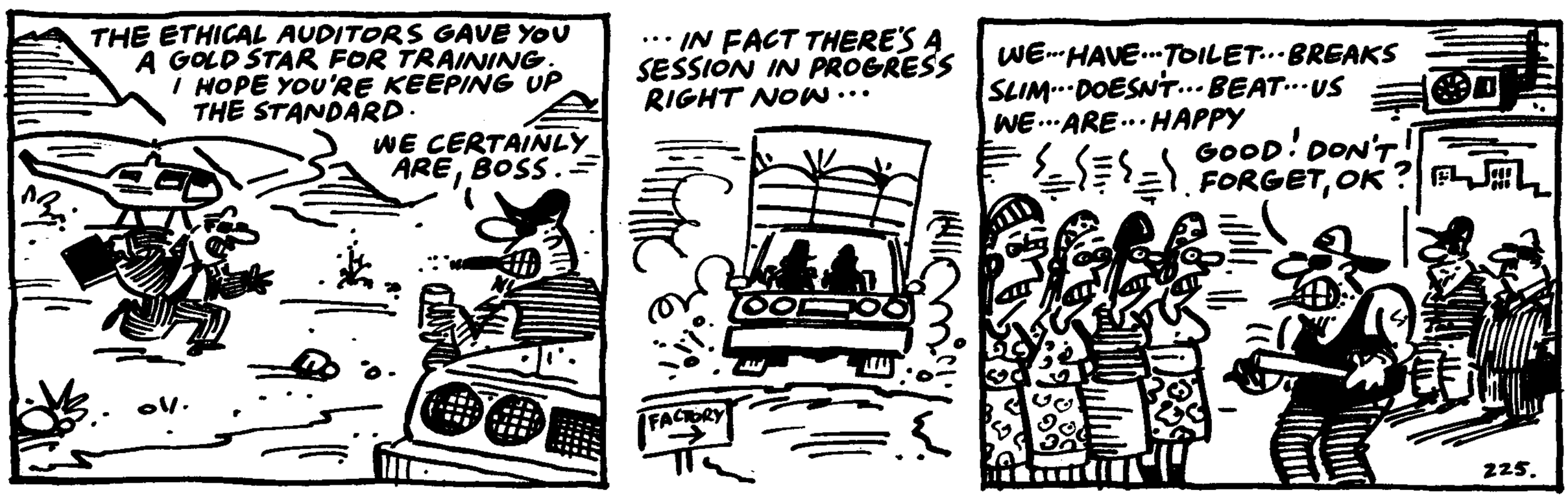
Earlier this year Berezovsky announced that he was turning all his business interests over to the ultra-respectable Patarkatsishvili. These interests included a half share in the Russian newspaper *Kommersant* – which Boris had bought from... Joorabchian's American Capital in 1999. American Capital had bought only a short while before the sale.

Boris has been linked with Corinthians in Sao Paolo ever since Joorabchian turned up there in 2005. Berezovsky told a Brazilian newspaper in 2005, after Joorabchian appeared, that he planned a new stadium for the club. He had been watching a Corinthians game shortly before he was arrested by Brazilian police in Sao Paolo last May. Berezovsky was said to have been questioned for several hours before being released without charge. The investigation was reported to involve Corinthians and Joorabchian's company, Media Sport Investment, that took over the running of the Brazilian club.

Just whose money is behind MSI and so

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG


THE ETHICAL AUDITORS GAVE YOU A GOLD STAR FOR TRAINING. I HOPE YOU'RE KEEPING UP THE STANDARD.
WE CERTAINLY ARE, BOSS.
... IN FACT THERE'S A SESSION IN PROGRESS RIGHT NOW ...
FACTORY
WE ... HAVE ... TOILET ... BREAKS
SLIM ... DOESN'T ... BEAT ... US
WE ... ARE ... HAPPY
GOOD! DON'T FORGET, OK?
225.

Number crunchings

£10m ■ Amount spent by police forces preparing for mergers which have now been scrapped

£10m ■ Salaries of 500 new police constables for a year

behind the Corinthians and now the West Ham deal, involving the transfer/parking of Argentinian stars Carlos Tevez and Javier Mascherano, has never been clear. What is certain is it is out of Joorabchian's league given his personal business record to date.

The current speculation is that the Middle East may be the source of the funding for any bid.

While not disputing the denials of any involvement by Boris or his partner Badri, there are similarities between the legitimate business model Joorabchian used at Corinthians and that employed in the past by Berezovsky, such as in his involvement with the Russian airline Aeroflot. In both cases the aim was to control cash flows rather than companies. This appears to be also what will happen at West Ham with the expected profit from selling on the two Argentinians.

THE family of former Abbey National analyst Richard Chang continue to pursue their claim for compensation after his 2004 suicide at the bank's headquarters.

So far efforts by Abbey to halt the employment tribunal claim brought by the Chang family has failed. These efforts are expected to resume at a pre-hearing due next week. At the previous hearing in June the tribunal was told by a former union representative at Abbey that Richard Chang should have been accompanied when he was interviewed by two investigators from Kroll Associates about an anonymous letter making allegations of corruption regarding software contracts. Instead he was invited to the meeting by pretext and then grilled for two hours.

Within an hour of taking a break from that meeting Richard Chang was seen falling from the fifth floor atrium at the Abbey headquarters.

WHILE others such as the NatWest Three, Jeremy Crook of Peregrine Systems and former Chelsea boss Ken Bates' old friend Stanley Tollman may be being fast-track extradited to the US, that old *Eye* favorite Alan Shephard is still here.

The serial conman was indicted two years ago on charges of defrauding victims of close to £10m for fees on non-existent loans. He first appeared in court here on April Fool's Day last year. A battery of medical and other evidence has so far kept the Shephard show on the road but not to the airport. The next hearing is due in October.

'Slicker'

Number crunchings

£44m ■ Amount spent by government on management consultants advising on new national control network for fire service

£44m ■ Salaries of 2,200 trainee firefighters for a year

EYE CROSSWORD 322

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 22 September 2006

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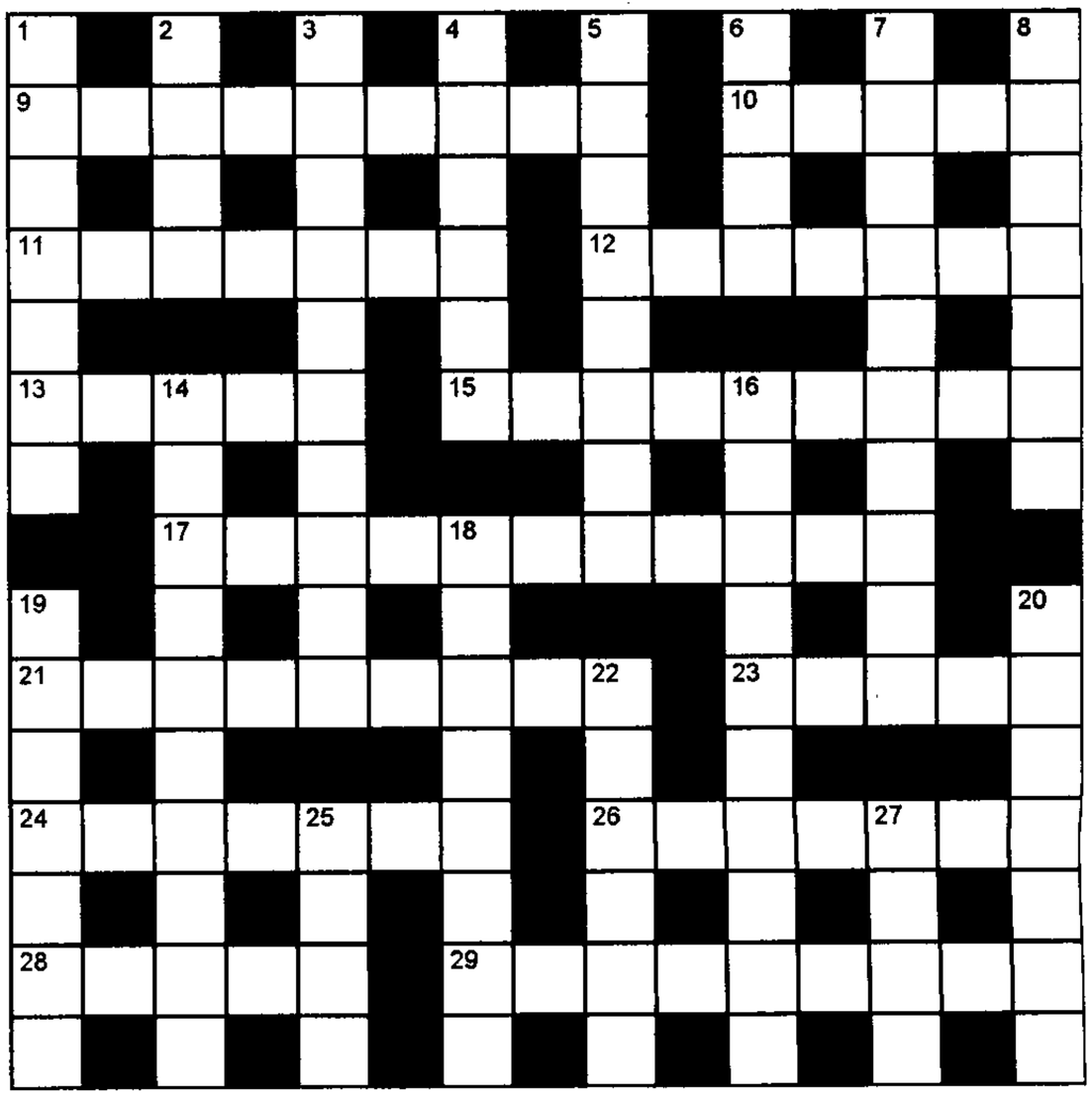

ACROSS

9 Gore joins the club with hard messy defeat (9)
10 See 25dn.
11 Belonging to Jeffrey's heart throb eccentric (7)
12 Overboard type said to make Buddy get tumescent (7)
13 Goddess at heart, Cherie? Answer: Tony's better half? (5)
15 Not in accord with "raging poof test" (university in second position) (3,2,4)
17/26 Competition between managers to "incentivise" staff? Being short of a member, you'd have no chance (4-7,7)
21 Shame pleb turned into utter shit (in inverted commas), say (9)
23 Fate of member squeezed in small car (5)
24 "Composer died during shag!" – *Sun* (7)
26 See 17ac.
28 For saddos he persists as an anagram of himself (5)
29 Boss cat? One to keep a party on the right lines (5,4)

DOWN

1 More than just the stomach turning ban on holding the erection flop of 2000 (7)
2 Nerd gets sticky stuff all over female (4)
3 Loose talk of unemployed wanting energy? Piss off! (4,6)
4 Long-serving leader's high voice (not a leader of Tories) (6)
5 Like many modern parks created by that lot upstairs (not Tony's no.1) (8)
6 Ace body-builder's reported muscles makes you climax (4)
7 Pisspoor rapper holding up English bastard – an insubstantial threat, really (5,5)
8 Me city centre's abandoned – Conservative cuts? (7)
14 First couple with woman, then bloke and dead woman (4,3,3)
16 Fellow to use tongue on Bowie, say, as a weapon (5-5)
18 Half of long hose gets inverted, look, during bang (4,4)
19 One pissed off about Tory leader treated like many a NASA launch (7)
20 Locations of the sleazy dancer's larger notebooks? (7)
22 He was interested in figures from European Union on vaginal parts (40% circumcised) to date (6)
25/10 No problem getting the 'ayes' to vacillate like vegetables (4-5)
27 Parrot house is after city address (4)

Crossword 321 winner: PETER LAND

ACROSS: 8/5 Better out than in 9 Hooch 10 L-dopa 11 Braindead 12 Wannabe 13 Innards 14 Naked 16/18 Big Brother 17 Dweeb 19 Windsor 21 Vibrato 23 Spacesuit 24 Girth 25 Skoda 26 Horsehair.

DOWN: 1/20 St John Stevas 2 Legal aid 3 Gobble 4 Steaming 6 Come true 7 Shades 8 Baldwin 15 Kangaroo 16 Boroughs 17 Debagged 19 Wisest 21 Voters 22 Airbag.

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HUSBAND

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The lunchtime showdown, which is held at the The Savoy Hotel, London, will be chaired by the **Rt. Hon. Michael Portillo**, with the **Rt. Hon. Sir Gerald Kaufman MP** keeping a tight rein on proceedings as adjudicator.

Guests, including an array of media moguls and political heavyweights such as the Rt. Hon. Sir Malcolm Rifkind MP, Andrew Neil, Edward Stourton and James Naughtie, will have an opportunity to join in the debate and pose their own questions to those in the hotseat for a donation of £100 to Cancer Research UK.

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Send your answers to:
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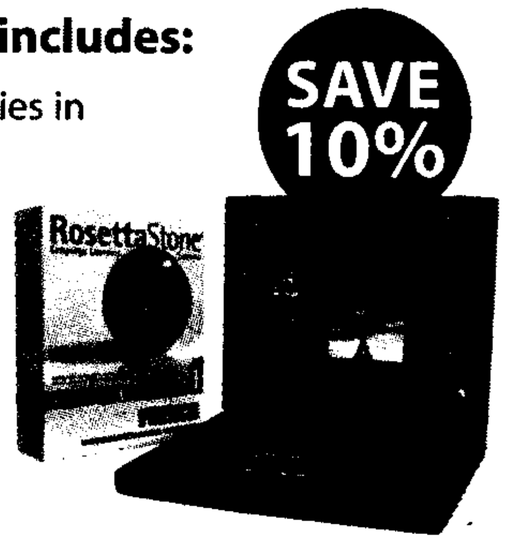

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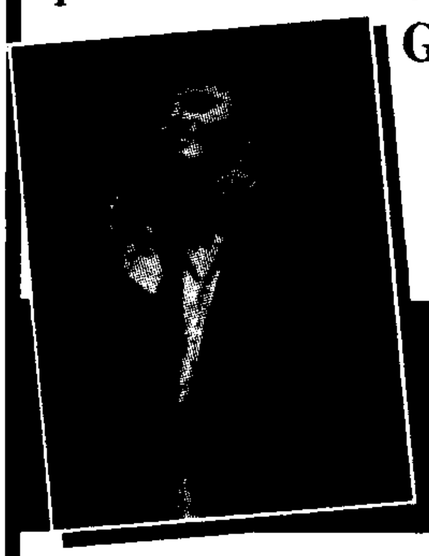

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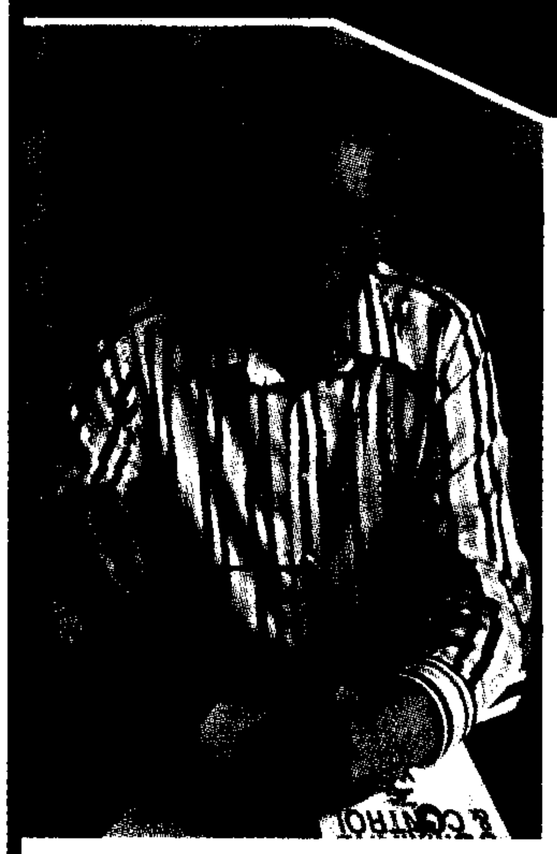

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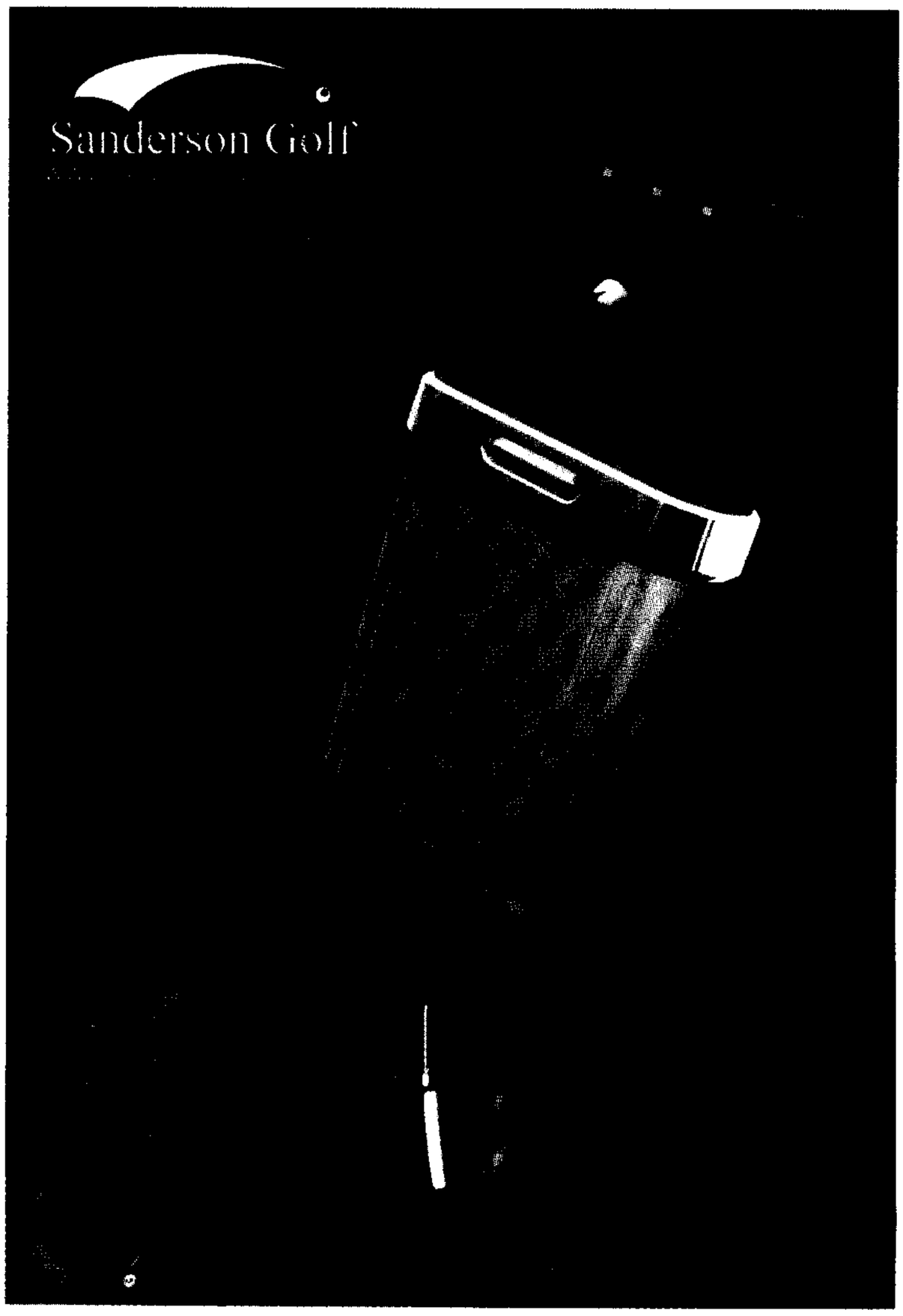

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WILL THIS HELP? Just checking £10K n/wide. S/C: 07-00-30. A/C: 57543985.

MOTHER, WORKING – ex avoided CSA, left debts: hungry month to place this, four children. Please help – £7,540 needed. Anything. S/C: 23-71-70. A/C: 79073115.

DO THESE ADS REALLY WORK? S\C: 40-47-79. A/C: 02039397.

SHAFTED PENSIONER (70 years – no ties), badly advised by accountant and saddled with large Inland Revenure debt. At risk of losing home in SW15 if forced into bankruptcy. £100,000 owing to Building Society, £180,000 equity in property. Would require £130,000 to settle with Revenue to save home. Need to remain in flat. Paying nominal rent. On demise, vacant possession will revert to the Good Samaritan. Help. Confidential. Reply Box 174222.

MY WIFE HAS MS but I cannot afford electric stairlift / wheelchair / other aids to ease her life. £5,000 would make all the difference: any help appreciated. NatWest, S/C: 60-10-05. A/C: 87257416.

A GENUINE CRY FOR HELP: A first-time house buyer with a mortgage offer already but desperate for a deposit of £6,000. Can you help? Any assistance will be highly appreciated. S/C: 60-06-25. A/C: 66815363.

PHILANTHROPIC ASSISTANCE required. PhD art student with mental health difficulties needs fees / maintenance funding. S/C: 87-68-43. A/C: 77438862.

YOU ARE NOT BILL GATES, but have similar intent. We are a learning research charity, with a high reputation but diminishing resources. Check us out on learningexperience.org.uk We have projects that need cash. Contact let@gold.ac.uk Learning from experience trust.

LOVELY, ENGLISH, ex-Stork Club hostess desperately needs cash for 'hostess island' retreat for retired girls. NatWest, S/C: 60-17-31. A/C: 10071652.

WORKING TWO JOBS to give young children a better life in Scotland. But struggling. Any help greatly appreciated. S/C-83-18-01. A/C: 00268877.

WOMAN. 40K DEBT. DESPAIR. Anything – will somehow pass your kindness on. S/C: 30-95-02. A/C: 00348653.

CLEANER WIDOW, worn out working 48-hour shifts. Needs new roof. Thank you. S/C: 30-90-28. A/C: 07375787.

CHANCER SEEKS £1.59 for bottle of premium cider. S/C: 87-37-67. A/C: 74774760.

BETRAYED AND SHAFTED by lesser beings, good-natured simpleton needs cash to stay ahead of creditors, reconstruct life and take revenge on former employer. Barclays, S/C: 20-92-60. A/C: 90050628.

POSTGRAD FUNDING NEEDED. No grant given. Need 12K for tuition fees. Start soon! HSBC, S/C: 401824. A/C: 81447009.

VISITING ELDERLY, giving energy-saving / keep warm advice. Funding sought. cliveghopper@yahoo.co.uk

£19,000 DEBT following manic illness (now treated). Help, however small, deeply appreciated. S/C: 07-00-30. A/C: 91087565.

DESPERATE. Trying to rebuild shattered life. Please help, anything gratefully received. Lloyds TSB, S/C: 30-98-61. A/C: 12000568.

ENGLISH PEN PAL needs $4,000 to help American in Utah prison. Lawyer fees. eileendnkly@yahoo.co.uk

SCAM VICTIM. Could lose house. Please rescue me. S/C: 07-01-16. A/C: 26782256.

EXCEPTIONALLY TALENTED Theatre Company (registered charity) urgently needs investment for next production. Contact us on ensemble@weaverhughesensemble.co.uk or donate to Barclays, S/C: 20-41-41. A/C: 70666068. Many thanks.

RAMSGATE ARTS COMPANY needs sponsors, patrons, board members. IOTA. Everything and nothing. Admin@galleryiota.org

PLEASE HELP: Husband redundant, young family to support. Panicking. Thanks. S/C: 30-98-77. A/C: 07317770.

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6.00pm (45mins)

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